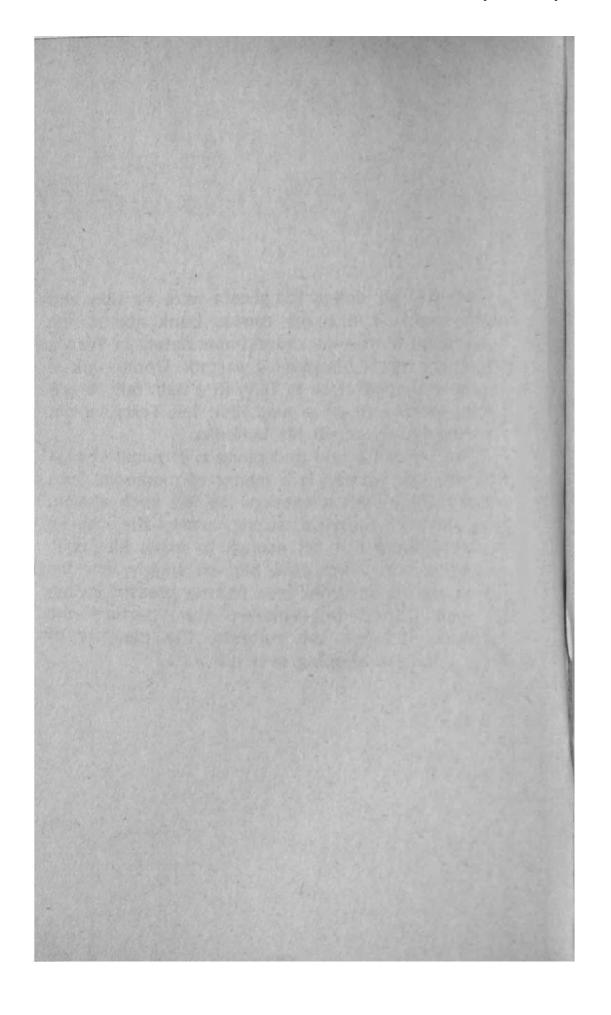


Tara was so weary, the sheets were so silky and clean—unlike the rough canvas bunk aboard the Yoshinosau Maru—he dozed immediately in Terry's strong nearness, his glowing warmth. Upon awakening, he snuggled close to Terry in a ball; felt Terry's strong, hard arm go around him; felt Terry's groin pressing hard against his buttocks.

Then, as if he had undergone a physical change from man to woman in a matter of moments, Tara wanted Terry with a passion. He felt such elation, lying in the blonde's strong arms—the change frightened him but not enough to make him push away the arm which held him so snugly, nor the lips above his upturned face. As they pressed lovingly upon Tara's lips—molten now, parting—the Japanese lad felt the softness, the pleasure of Terry's tongue slipping over his . . .



## THE PURPLE RING

by Carl Corley

All characters and situations in this book are fictitious

A PEC FRENCH-LINE NOVEL

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## Chapter One

Tara Akira slipped out of the shower naked, leaving the hot water running, and eased cat-like through the fo'c'stle bunks of his Japanese sailor mates, and out onto the open deck of the Oriental ship the Yoshinosau Maru.

Soon, he hoped, Nakamura Yoshiharu, his best friend would follow and, after the Captain had made his bedtime tour of inspection and found the shower running and his clothes hanging on the door-knob outside, Nakamura would gather up his belongings and toss them over the

side of the ship to him.

Japanese Captains were strict and to skip ship on American soil was a crime punishable by a long endless term in prison on the Island of Hokkaido and Tara had no such intention. He was clever for his twenty four years, having been a gym coach for three years in Tokyo before joining the Imperial Merchant Seamen; was gifted in judo; an excellent swimmer having won numerous prizes at the Shirasato swimming beach at Chiba; was skilled with the artist'sbrush; had molded papier-mache figures for the many festivals; and could beat the "tsuzmi" with great musical pride. Too, he was of the last generation of the Samurai, those ancient warriors who were the most perfect physical specimens Japan had to offer. World War 11 had killed off most of them, with the exception of a mighty few, and the old traditional Samurai had all but

vanished as a result of the war's defeat. Since then a new Samurai had sprung up—eager young men anxious to learn judo, karate, war games and bodybuilding—of which he was an apt student. Tara had been referred to as "The Greek of the Orient," by the gifted writer Lafcadio Hearn, and because of his small, but perfectly-proportioned body, many of his comrades had called him "Taido," ("the way of the body") and he had tried to live up to that glorious title.

Though the Toulouse Street wharf in New Orleans was well lighted there were few strollers out along its rotten dilapidated plank apron, a few roustabouts here and there; he noticed a dockhand or two; being Africans they would care little about his nakedness.

Slipping over the side of the ship, his wet body shining like a silvery fish in the moonlight, Tara slid down the mooring rope, using his hands and locking his short, muscular legs over the damp line so that he could walk himself down to the dock. He had a little trouble going over the circular ratguard, cutting the calf of his leg once on the sharp, thin metal, but made it, as the Americans would say, "OK."

Once on the dock, he glanced up quickly toward the dark hull of the ship to see if Nakamura had made it safely through the crew's quarters with his clothes. With a feeling of freedom and glee, he saw his luminous face loom up above the poop deck. Nakamura gave a low whistle, then tossed over his clothes, jeans, a T-shirt, and canvas loafers tied in a crude bundle. They hit the rough boards with a thud, but a few feet

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from where Tara stood. He grabbed them quickly into his naked arms before the Captain'a serpent eyes should spot them and call out in alarm. He slid into the shadows.

"Ki ga nagai.. Ki ga nagai," Nakamura called down to him, disdaining to be wary of the Captain's sharp ears. "Be patient! Be patient! You will find your father."

Tara nodded, waved, then put his thumb and middle finger together, making a round O, indicating the OK signal.

"Kati..kati!" Nakamura yelled. "Victory!

Victory!"

"Dai Nipponteikoku," Tara shouted back. "Greater Japan!" Then he was off into the night, having sported with his life by pausing to say a few harmless words to his friend Nakamura; risking everything to hold Nakamura as near to him as possible for that one precious moment. He was a little sad now, for he realized gravely that he probably would never see Nakamura again.

He came upon a section of rickety steps leading down to the water, and he bounded down them to a place he would be completely hidden from possible strollers on the wharf to dress. His naked body was still wet, but his clean, satinsmooth muscles shone in the diffused light like polished marble, and accented his robust male-

ness.

Though Tara was tiny of stature, a miniature from a miniature race, small even by Japanese standards—only five feet tall and weighing less than 120 pounds—he was a ball of fire, a bit cocky, alert as a fox, as flexible as a paper

serpent on festival day. The hair on his head was as black as mourning silk, thick and constantly in unruly tangles over his slanting eyes. But there was no sign of hair on his satin-like body, except in the region of his crotch where his enormous prong and seeds dangled provocatively, advertising his vigorous masculinity, and in the hollows of his armpits—this sparingly, and not in black, curling mats like his pubic area.

His chest resembled the rounded contours on the armour or the Fukushima warriors, the nipples tiny, protruding garnets; and his waist line was so small he could span it with his hands, his fingers touching lightly at his dimpled naval. His legs were short and thick, in true Samurai tradition, with creamy thighs, rounded like sunlit gourds, and hard, muscular calves to match. His arms, in exact proportion with his shapely legs, were short, thick, the muscles smoothly rounding to his shoulder bones and chest plates in broad, lightly-veined curves. He was like a miniature statue sculptured from the purest ivory, utterly without blemish or scar, one of nature's beautiful and living toys.

He looked and acted genuinely Japanese though his father was an American, Erik Shanon, a Marine, who had wooed his mother, Tara Hanna. From that fickle, whimsical wooing he had emerged into the wild scheme of things, one more anxious, eager creature—graceful and covert as a Japanese god, micrified of flesh and body, loved and wanted by no one except his uncle, Tara Rasha, a performer in the Kabuki drama who played both male and female roles. Tara Akira's mother had died when he was less

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than a year old, preferring death by hara-kiri to life without honor and his Marine father had returned to American shores long hence.

It was for this reason that Tara had jumped ship in the first place, to try to locate his father; to find a place in the world amid his own kin, to become an American . . . a Japanese dream. Not that he loved his father, nor even knew him, even going so far as to assume the name of Akira from an ancient shrine, rather than Shanon, his father's name—or the name Rasha, the ancient, traditional name his Marine father had managed to ruin. But his uncle had told him many wonderful things about the handsome black-eyed marine who had come to Japan as a color guard in the American Embassy; how he had met and loved his mother, Hanna, till her death; and had returned to the United States with a broken heart.

Now, Tara Akira longed to find him, And he would, if he had to roam the Americas, having not the vaguest idea how vast America was. All he had was the name, Erik Shanon, to go on, and that was enough for him. To throw in faintexcuse not to search heartedness as an him out, was not in Tara's makeup. He was young and hard, as all youth is hard; came from a country that had known hard, impossible times, and the grit, and determination that was forged into his mettle invested him with the potential to endure almost any hardship to win what he wanted.

All he owned was on his back, and a huge, onyx ring with the imperial dragon embossed on it in high relief, which his uncle had given him

upon graduating from the Ota Ward Gymnasium in Tokyo. That had been a great day for him. He had had his picture taken standing in front of the Olympic Memorial Tower in Komazawa park, dressed only in a posing strap, his smooth, satin body greased down with baby oil so that his flesh would shine. Remembering, he looked down at the ring on his right hand, and thought again of his uncle, Tara Rasha.

"Find Erik Shanon," his uncle had said to him as they had stood in Tokyo harbor. "He is an American, whom all Japanese hate a little; but he is a wonderful man, Tara Akira, and will love you like a father, will give you a future in

that land of golden opportunity."

Tara saw little of that golden opportunity this fearful caution-filled night, as he climbed the rickety steps of the wharf and made his way through the darkness. His pockets were empty, with not a single yen there and he cursed himself for not eating before he had jumped ship, or getting Nakamura to pack a lunch for him from left-overs in the galley.

"American men like small, well-built Japanese boys," he remembered his uncle Tara Rasha saying time and time again, realizing only vaguely what was implied by that ominous remark. "They put yen in your pockets, pretty clothes on your back, if you let them kutusita.. kutusita (suck..suck!)." Well, thanks to the Torii Shrine, he was still clean, pure of body, and he wanted to remain that way. The rules of the Samurai were strict, especially regarding morals, and none was-or could ever be a true, noble Samurai if he indulged in bodily pleasures.

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But Tara understood his uncle, and did not love him less for this knowledge. A performer in the Kabukiza Theater, dressing as both man and woman, he had been exposed to the hennas (queers) of Tokyo, and knew their anarchistic world. At first, when he was very small, this had been confusing to Tara, for his uncle, many times at home, had dressed as a female, and Tara was often bewildered as to which sex his uncle truly belonged-male or female. But he had loved his uncle dearly, for Tara Rasha had reared and educated him; had inspired him to take up the atheletic schooling which would perfect his young body; and had introduced him to the Samurai, the noblest organization to which a youth could belong in modern times. Too, the Kabukiza theater was a noble profession and, unlike the western attitude, was not frowned upon as being effeminate.

"I will find work," Tara mumbled to himself as he went over the railway tracks and beyond Decatur street into Jackson Square. A number of people were milling about the statue of a soldier on a rearing horse in the center. Nuns were busy feeding pigeons, several lone women walked the street, and laughing children played along the wrought-iron benches; but Tara kept to the dark invasion of shadows made by the Formosa trees and the magnolias in the square, fearful he might bump into a policeman and have to go through their questioning. Though he spoke English, he realized all foreigners had to register once a year in the States, and they would have him locked up and deported before he had made the first step toward locating his

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father.

He ventured into the French Quarter, his chubby hands thrust into his jeans, pausing in front of each dimly-lit shop window he came to, studying their wares absently: paintings, statues, miniature soldiers, books, more paintings, flowers, jewelry, glass birds, souvenirs knickknacks, novelties. He came to a Japanese shop and stopped abruptly; stared through the grimy glass at the articles . . . fans, beautiful brocade kimonos, puppets, coolie hats, paper flowers, statues of ivory, the kites of many festivals-all the gaudy, colorful nostalgic artifacts of home. A lump rose to the throat. The sight alone made him homesick, and for a brief moment of struggle with his determination, he longed to be back in Tokyo, with his many body-building friends of the Samurai.

Then, summoning his courage, he rose to his full height, moved on down the street, wary to keep in the dark shadows of the buildings, observe the crowds of people milling up and down the streets, curious to him, for he had seen but few Americans.

He turned off Pirates' Alley into Chartres then, as if lost and, winding in a circle, headed back toward the river and the wharfs. There was a small open cafe on the corner. The aroma of cooking food assailed his nostrils, and he went up to the wide opening and stared, uninhibitedly, at the numerous customers sitting on swivel stools, wolfing down savory meals. He licked his lips. He was so hungry his gut growled, and the odor of onions, sausage, mustard, and grease invaded the void of his hunger like a dream,

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possessing his mind.

"Hungry, Chink?" came a gruff voice from one of the stools. Tara glanced in that direction, noticed a fat man of about forty eyeing him curiously. He might have been muscular once, Tara considered as his keen eyes gave him the once over—a Japanese trait, seeing everything, never missing anything. But now the white, dough-like flesh clung to his bones slackly, shaking whenever he moved, and the thick, boxertype face had lost its firmness, with nothing but the skull crown and the broad nose to hold it into place. His lower jaw sagged, and he needed a shave.

"Me no Chink. Me Japanese," Tara answered him, low in tone, but politely. He had learned to be polite to foreigners. This way you gained much.

"Is there any difference?" the fat man asked, his mouth stuffed with food, some of it dripping down his chin.

Tara thought there was, but he made no comment. The Chinese and the Japanese had fought for centuries, and he saw no reason to add to the tumult now, for he wanted to remain as inconspicous as he could, now that he had gained entrance to the United States. He had one goal: to find his father, that was all of it. He watched the fat man eating, and thought him very like a dog. He was as hairy as a dog too, with long black bristles sticking out thickly on his huge arms, and showing in a black mat at the opening of his T-shirt, which long since had lost any signs of cleanliness.

The fat man turned from his plate; looked at

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him with a superior air Tara immediately resented.

"Bet you'd like a bowl of rice, huh, Chink?"

Tara nodded, ignoring the insults.

"First you gotta answer a few questions."

"No! No answer questions!" Tara cried, a-

tremble suddenly. He started to move on.

"Now wait, Chink, nobody's going to harm you," the fat man growled, as other customers, turning from their plates like greedy pigs, eyed the commotion. "Come here."

Tara remained firm careful to remain in the

kind shadows.

"Come here!" the fat man insisted.

Reluctantly, Tara moved closer.

"You from one of them Jap ships in the harbor?"

Tara shook his head, completely frightened now.

"Jumped ship, eh?"

"No! No jump ship!" Tara cried his eyes but slits now. "Me on leave. Me take stroll...that's all."

"Okay! Okay! Don't get your dander up!" said the fat man, with a grin. "But you're broke."

"No broke."

"Don't lie to me, Chink. You broke?"

Tara, bowing his head in embarrassment, nodded. A roar of laughter followed as others in the street cafe, diverting their attention from their meal, joined in with the fat man.

"No yen left," Tara cried, his voice but a

whisper.

"Ah! See! I'm right," the fat man said. He

reached out, caught Tara by the wrist, jerked him to him. He leaned over, so close Tara got a whisp of his rancid body odor. "Listen, Chink, Chinaman, Jap, whatever you are, I know you jumped ship, but I ain't gonna tell, if you play your cards right."

"Cards?"

"Ah, never mind that," the fat man said, raising his voice again. "I've played the ships before, Nippon. You like that name better, eh?"

Tara nodded.

"Tell you what I'm gonna do, since you broke and all and don't know your way to the horse in the square, I'm gonna buy you a couple of hamburgers...do you like hamburgers?" Tara nodded. "We'll take em with us. You stay at my place tonight. Make sure the shore patrol don't mug you, okay? What you say?"

Tara loathed the sight of the pudgy fat man but the words "shore patrol" produced far more aversion so he gave a reluctant nod.

"Good! I knowed you'd see it my way." He ordered the hamburgers. "And rush em Marias, got a hungry boy on my hands."

They had to wait but a few minutes. The dark, black-haired man behind the counter brought the hamburgers, stuffed into a white paper sack.

"Playing the Good Samaritan bit tonight, Marias," the fat man said, as he got up from the stool and tossed a few coins on the counter. "Doing my good deed for the day."

"Poor kid," the man behind the counter said, his dark eyes raking over Tara, then the fat man with loathing. "Taking up with the likes of you. What's the world coming to?"

The fat man shot him an insolant look.

"Mind your own fuckin' business, Marias. Ain't like I was taking a virgin. Them Japs all the same." He said this very low, bending over the counter his face close to the man called Marias. "None of them got no morals; do anything for a buck, or a half-a-buck."

"You oughta know," the man behind the counter said. "Now get, Big Semmes, before you

give my place a bad reputation."

The fat man gave him the finger.

Though uneasy, Tara considered staying with the fat man preferable to being picked up by the roaming shore patrol, so he followed as Semmes hurried, curiously, through the dark and

grimy streets.

The fat man lived in a dilapidated tenant house, his room was up three flights of stairs which creaked, like the soundtrack from some horror movie; and the dim lights—single bulbs hanging from flyspecked cords from the cobwebby ceiling—threw black shadows on the torn paper walls, like crouching, terrifying beasts.

"It ain't the Hotel Roosevelt," the fat man granted as they went into his room, "but it'll do

nicely for my purposes."

"It will do fine for tonight," Tara assured him innocently, as he entered and gazed forlornly about him.

The fat man grunted.

"Well, pretty boy, one night is all I'll need you for. Never take em on twice. Twice and they get to think I'm their keeper or something."

The room smelled of mold, tobacco, ash, and piss, with hints of disinfectant, like stale per-

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fume on an old gown. It was not much larger, Tara considered, than the toilet in the gardens of the Samboin Temple in Kyoto, boasting only one narrow, filth-begrimed window with its cracked glass which looked down on black spires and dirty rooftops of other buildings in the same decayed condition. The bed was of cast iron, such as those seen often in French girlie films; the knotty mattress damp with brown stains, holes where the cotton tufted out from cigarette burns. There were no sheets and no pillows, which instantly brought to mind the scarlet silk sheets on the raised sindais in his uncle's Tokyo home. One kitchen chair, unpainted, and a rickety table completed the furnishings.

"Here's your grub," the fat man said, handing him the paper sack. "I'll ring for tea," he added jokingly, almost mockingly. "Or had you rather I ordered champagne?" He immediately took off his T-shirt, displaying a flabby chest, so thick with wiry hair it looked like a grizzly bear's.

Tara gave him one look of acid disgust then went to the window, seating himself on the sill and pitching into his hamburgers. They were soaked in grease, but he was too hungry to mind. He looked through the cracked pane to the streets below, at the dark wall of the tenant house directly opposite his window; noticed a bulky woman with frizzy red hair sitting out on the fire escape. She was strumming a cheap guitar and singing (or trying to sing). It was more of a wail, he thought, remembering with a sad heart the litling, flowing music from his own beautiful world, a garnet jewel compared to this filthy, crumbling city, with its rancid smells, the

grime, the disorientation from its huge, sprawling back shape, the silvery water winding its way to the Gulf.

The fat man pulled off his worn brogans, tossed them aside. They hit the dirty floor with a thud. Then he slipped out of his soiled, paint-smeared jeans, flung them on the back of the chair.

Tara gave him a sidelong glance, took one dejected look at his nakedness, his bulk of shapeless flesh, the hair on his white, dough-like person like the bristled hair on a hog; raked his glance over his male parts, at his long dangling prick, its spongy purple head, his balls hanging halfway to his flabby knees, like ostrich eggs in a plastic bag,

"Pull off, Nippon, want to see what you got," the fat man ordered roughly, commandingly.

Reluctantly, Tara stood up. His uncle had informed him about such men, but this was not the idea he had pictured for himself.

"You want girl-boy?" he asked, his voice trembling.

The fat man looked at him in mock surprise.

"Now ain't you the naive one! Sure that's what I want. Do I have to hit you in the head with an axe to make you understand? Where did they raise you in Japan, in one of them nutty temples?"

Tara, with a bit of braggardism, told him where he had been raised, of his graduation and his many accomplishments.

"A regular male-Geisha, eh? Well, pull 'em off. Wanta see how you're hung; see if you got what I like, before I make my price."

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"You henna?" Tara questioned, backing back against the filthy window.

"Don't gimme that Jap mumbo-jumbo," the fat man growled, moving nearer. "What does this henna mean?"

"Queer! You queer?"

"You fuckin' right I'm queer," he shouted, saughing, the sound coming from deep within his heaving gut. "And I'm not a goddam bit ashamed of it! You act surprised, Nippon! You never seen a cocksucker like me?"

Tara, still backed up against the window, his hand squeezing his cold hamburger, shook his head from side to side.

"Well, maybe I don't paint my face like the fruits in Japan do, or walk prissy like a woman, like some of them swishing numbers out at the My-Oh-My club, but I like to gobble a cock, boy, and that's all there is to it."

"You pay...you pay to-er-gobble?" Tara asked, but summoning all his strength, his reserve if this rancid, puffy degenerate said yes. "You pay yen for pretty girl-boy?"

"Gotta see what you got between your legs first, boy. Then, I'll tell you how much you're worth. I pay good, ask any of them punks walking the square. Make good wages as a dockhand, spend it on booze and cock; young sweet juicy cock, mind you. The come is sweeter on young studs; not green, like you find on a guy around thirty; I don't fuck with them older ones. Like em young, right out of the hothouse nursery."

"Never been gobbled," Tara protested shaking all over. He was deathly afraid of this growling, panting blob of a man who now seated

himself in the straight-backed chair, and had pulled it directly in front of him, waiting, expectant.

"Don't gimme no Sunday School lesson," he snapped, his eyes like fish eyes now; glittering strangely as they assessed Tara's person. "Nobody knows the difference, whether you been sucked once or a hundred. So peel off, Nippon, or else I'll kick your Jap ass out in the streets; maybe rat on you—tell the shore patrol.

With trembling hands, Tara unzipped his jeans, slipped them down to his knees. no sooner than he had done this than the fat man, reaching out eagerly, caught hold of his prick, skinned it back lovingly, then cupped his palm under his enormous balls, lifted them like he was inspect-

ing a breeding stallion.

"I gotta say one thing," the fat man breathed admiringly, his eyes even more silvery now, gluttonous on Tara's thighs. "You're sure hung for a kid your size. Nice mushroom head, spongy, like I like 'em; nice shape—not all twisted up—deformed like some of em I've sucked. Never get them balls in my mouth though, they's just too big; but big balls means lots of come. Give you twenty bucks."

"How much is—ah—twenty bucks?" Tara asked readily, in desperate need of the money, but still afraid, still trembling at this pudgy man's hands on his prick, pulling at his balls, rubbing his hands playfully up and down his inner thighs.

The fat man thought for a moment.

"7200 yen," he said, when he had added the amount in his head. "It'll give you a start.

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Twenty bucks will go a long way with a Jap. Nothing but rice to eat . . . what you say, kid?"

"Me don't know," Tara replied, wondering forlornly how he could endure this monstrous male who kept fondling him, making him sick.

"I gotta have it, kid," the fat man grunted, the saliva dripping from his thick, gross lips, his fisheyes glued to his groin. Tara's prick, he realized from the steady feel, was becoming turgid. "Gotta have it, kid. Gotta put that gorgeous thing in my mouth, gotta clean it with my tongue gotta suck on it all night ... twenty five, kid, twenty five."

The fat man had worked himself into a frenzy now, and he, too, had an erection, its long snout sticking through the rungs in the chair-back.

Tara gave him a timid nod, his eyes narrowing to tiny slits, as before him, in a wild nightmarish dream, he saw all the beauty of his youth and innocence slipping away into the gory blackness of desire: saw too, the tragic end of his brave Samurai existence, the link with the gallant warriors he had worked with naked, their vigorous bodies rising up in the golden sunlight, their pure and sublime strength, their manly beauty of symmetry, in all their splendor and melancholy and, yes, their poetry. He had been one of them, pure as the light which delineated their naked forms, as healthy as gold, as innocent as the ancient gods of Kyoto, Buddhism supreme.

Now he felt as nothing, dirty, soiled, as he was guided to the rancid bed by this panting, caressing fat man, selling his young, clean, beautiful body for enough yen on which to eat, to live. He was placed on his back by groping hands in the

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darkness which seemed to belong to nothing, just pawing, caressing hands sliding over his entire body, feeling up every part of him, his feet, his toes, his inner thighs, his behind, his nipples, running recklessly through his dark hair then back again time and time again to his groin.

Then, as in the death lock of a monster, he felt hot lips slide over his prick, felt them go down to his rich black nest of pubic hair, and with the bland innocence of his age, his youth, he

flinched.

"What you scared of, kid?" the fat man bellowed, still playing with it, his fingers firm, demanding, selfish.

"You may bite," Tara cried, almost in tears.

"I don't want to bite you and spit it out, kid," the fat man said, always so superior of air, always so dominant in tone, as if, Tara thought, he himself had no say, no privilege, no rights over his own body, his own being as a person. The man acted as if Tara's pody belonged to him now, for only twenty five bucks; that he could do with him whatever he pleased, satisfy whatever hungers motivated his carnal desires. "I want to suck you, kid, love you, lick you all over. Just lie still, relax. You'll still be yourself when I'm done with you."

The groping, saliva-dripping mouth went instantly back, cupped itself over Tara's prick, as hard, firm fingers lifted him up, squeezed his buttocks, pulling his body to his mouth, as if he could not get it in deep enough. Deep, guttural animal moans drifted up from the mouth, the hot opening which seemed an awe-some, devouring thing to Tara, and the fat man's

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body, a huge, monstrous blob sinking into the smelly mattress, thrashed about wildly, like a walrus on icy banks.

When he was through, licking Tara's sperm which had missed his mouth and had run down his smooth thighs, he let out singing, lisping intonations of delight, calling him pretty names, washing away the last ounce of sperm with his lolling tongue, wetting Tara's body from knees to naval.

"You sure shot a wad, Jappy boy," the fat man sighed contentedly, his breath coming in long, blisful gusts. "Liked to knocked the back of my brain out."

"So sorry" Tara murmured sleepily, hopeful, but with faint-heartedness, that he would get paid, now that the deplorable fat man had had

his way with him.

"Oh, don't apologize," the fat man cried, holding Tara's lower body in his huge, plump arms. "The rougher the better. Don't take to these sissy faggots. I like em all he-man." He then slid his monstrous tub of flesh upon Tara's body, pressing him deep into the rancid mattress, shoved his thighs apart and began to make coupling motions. His enormous arms went under Tara's shoulders, and in his rapid movements going up and down readily, now with frenzy, he almost bent Tara double, smothering him with his ponderous weight.

In a wild melee of motion, sweating, panting, trying to kiss Tara with molten, saliva-dripping

lips, he spermed, then went limp.

"I can't breathe," Tara complained, trying to push the fat blob off him. He refused to budge.

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He just lay there on Tara's body in a sweating heap, his breathing coming in ragged jerks, his groping hands caressing, trying vainly to be lovable with their trembling touch.

Tara, pinned beneath him, locked under the wedge of loose flesh, his keen nostrils picking up the scents about this shabby room, the smell of mold, of piss, of sperm, his ears keyed to the sounds of the night; car horns honking, people shouting, laughing; the red-haired woman's singing, ships in the harbour; thought of his body, his fine body of which he had once been so proud, the heart of the Samurai, thought of what his uncle had said about America being the golden land of opportunity, and he began to sob, quietly, muffled, so that the fat man would not hear and complain.

"What you getting mushy about?" the fat man said, who had heard and made a poor attempt at loving him, embracing his face with a frame of flesh and probing for his mouth. "You sorry you lost your virginity? I don't see god dammit why. You sell your ass like a street-walking whore then bawl because I got your come. Want it back, baby. I'll spit it back into your mouth." He cupped his wet lips over Tara's, who squirmed savagely to free himself.

The fat man got up, switched on the light, his enormous body panting. "Regular hell cat ain't you" he cried, stroking back his oily hair with a plump hand. "But you're a nice kid." He picked up a filthy towel, tossed it carelessly on the bed. "Here, wipe up my come. You'll be smelling like a whore."

Tara obeyed, taking the towel and wiping the

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sperm from his flat belly, around his pubic hair where it had soaked, and down one creamy thigh.

"Yes, you're a good kid," the fat man went on, admiring Tara with pale, glittering eyes that resembled hot glass. "Take my advice, hop that Jap ship and go back to your home, fall in love with some pretty Japanese girl, marry, and have a pack of little Nips."

"No can go back," Tara said to him, getting

out of bed and putting on his clothes.

"So you did jump ship, like I said you did," the fat man accused, lighting a cigarette and puffing on it wildly, as if to consume it in one draw. "You're in bad trouble if the shore patrol ever finds you, and it will."

Tara shook at that, not that he was physically afraid. It was the unknown "Me have stay Un-

ited States. Find father."

"He a Jap?"

"American, American marine."

"Oh, so there was hanky-panky going on." He

laughed a sullen laugh.

"Well, kid, like I said, go back to Japan where you belong. This place, this rotten city, New Orleans, this is no place for a decent kid like you. Too many queers! Too many hustlers! Why I know a kid here that is only thirteen, and hustles. Got a prick about the size of my little finger." He held his finger up. "But he rakes in the dough. Now you, you could knock their eyes out with that thing you've got, but you'd get ruined, kid, and I'd hate to see a fine kid like you turned into a whore... so go back, hop that ship, explain to the Captain. He may

give you a day or two in the brig, but hell, man, you would be on your way home then...what you say?"

"No sir, me got to stay America, find father, him find me big career here in United States."

"Career, shit!" the fat man stormed, snufflng his cigarette out in a cheap terracotta tray on the table. "You'll end up washing dishes in some greasy dago cafe, or selling your butt in the quarter like the rest of these mangy punks. You're too good for all that kind of rot, kid. You deserve something better." He glanced bitterly at the shabby room, the rancid bed, the grimy window. "I can't help you much, kid. I don't like a steady anyway, gives me the creeps, loving a kid, makes me nervous having the same dick around all the time, understand? I like a new one. Get curious every time I bump into a fresh punk, wonder what he looks like between his legs. My goal in life is to make every punk that comes to New Orleans. But you, you ain't for this life. Sorry I sucked you, ashamed of myself for taking fuckin' advantage of you like I did." He fumbled for his jeans, pulled out his wallet, took out a bill, a twenty then a five. "Here, here's the money I promised. I always pay."

Tara took the money greedily and stuffed it into his jeans.

"Where—where can I go?" he asked, anxious to get out of this foul room, these haunting smells which he would smell the rest of his life, the memory of what had happened here. He shuddered at the thought.

The fat man scratched his head. Then he clawed at his groin, uninhibited, rubbed his

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flabby ass, as if caressingly

"Maybe you would be safe up at that circus," he said, as if still thinking, which was taxing his brain. "The patrol never goes up there. Them circus people, most of them foreigners anyhow."

"Where is circus?" Tara questioned, as his

hopes soared.

"It's up on Lake Pontchartrain Beach, north of the university, where all them fruity college kids go, along Lakeshore drive. You can't miss it, kid. Just get on St. Claude, then turn on Elysian Fields avenue; takes you straight into the circus grounds. Its a permanent place, stays there year round. And like I said, the shore patrol never goes up there. Maybe you find some Jap friends."

"Thanks very much," Tara said, his former faith restored. He gave the fat man a hasty, abashed look. "You save life."

The fat man let out a guttural grunt.

"I doubt it, kid," he fumed. "With your looks and that big box between your legs they'll be after you. Every queen in New Orleans will be out of her nelly mind."

"American men like Jap, no?" Tara cried, his dark eyes radiantly lit, sparkling in the dimly-lit

room.

"Innocent . . eh?" the fat man scowled, looking at him askew. "You been around already, kid. Sure had me snowed."

A toilet flushed down the far end of the hall,

and a door squeaked.

"Me go now, while still dark," Tara said, eager to depart.

"Keep your pants on," the fat man advised,

giving him a wink. "You're a good blow."

Tara went hurriedly down the steps, feeling the omniousness of his shadow flung eerily against the papered walls. Then out into the dark streets. He breathed into his young lungs a breath of fresh air. He could still smell the rancidity of that room, the fat man's sweaty body, the stinking mattress, the foul odor of bread and meat and vegetables trapped in there for days. His own body smelled like that, as the odors still clung to him persistently. He wished then for the Ota Ward Gymnasium in Tokyo so that he could take a much-needed bath in volcanic steam.

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## Chapter Two

As Tara Akira made his way down the crowded street, leaving that rancid room, that disreputable man forever, he felt he would never be again clean. And this guilt, this loss of pride, affected him doubly so, from his point of view, especially, for he was of a race where cleanliness was regarded with a high premium among man's virtues. The Japanese people were the cleanest people in the world, even the peasantry, and no where else on the globe was bathing of one's body considered with such serious regard, bathing having acquired a traditional, ritualistic importance.

At the corner a tall, lanky man of about thirty, wobbling back and forth drunkenly, gave

him the fish eye.

"Two-two dollar to suck you, kid!"

Tara paused, his eyes narrowed to slits.

"Let you look for two dollar, mister."

The man nodded. He motioned Tara into an alley.

Tara unzipped his faded jeans, reeled out his

prick.

"Wow!" the drunk cried, his bloodshot eyes growing enormous, wild. "You're all dong, boy! Can I—I feel of it, boy? Unbelievable!"

"Two dollar more, you feel."

The man took out his wallet, handed him a five. He reached down, his manicured fingers,

pink, delicate, coiling around it. He skinned it back, squeezed the head, as it slowly grew to enormous proportions.

"I want to lick it, boy," the drunk man said, his voice trembling now. "Gotta lick it, once, huh, can I, boy?"

Tara looked up and down the alley. It was safe. The alley was like a cavern.

"Lick once-five more dollar!"

The man swayed on his feet. He fumbled for his wallet, took out another five and handed it to Tara who almost snatched it from him.

"You're a hard bargain, boy," the man said.
"But you got it, boy!" He leaned over, thrust
out his tongue, as Tara held his prick steady
with his right hand. The man's tongue went into
the opening. Tara jerked back his prick.

"You licked-that's enough." He zipped up

his jeans.

"Ah! come on, boy," the man cried persistently, laying a nervous hand on Tara's shoulder. "That wasn't no lick."

Tara jerked his hand away. "Sorry." He rushed out of the alley, and down Chartres street. He turned quickly at the corner, merged into the crowd. He was on Royal street now, and he slowed his pace as he admired the articles in the store windows. He passed a place where they made perfume. He sniffed freely. He loved scents, and the whole area smelled as if it had rained perfume, the sultry darkness giving the aroma a rich fragrance all its own.

"Smells like a French whore," a man said to him who had paused near the entrance to the

shop. "You like perfume, Jappy?"

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Tara nodded. He looked at the man from head to foot in a glance. He was tall, slim, dressed in an elegant gray suit of some silky tropical weave. He wore a small-brimmed hat, pale yellow, with a multi-colored band. A thin, neatly-trimmed mustache, jet black, accented his overly large mouth, and lent to his facial features a liveliness which otherwise would have been drab. Acne pocks marked his chin and neck, and his complexion was waxy, girlishly white.

In that one look of scrutiny, Tara decided he

did not like him.

"Where you from?" the man asked, and his accent seemed northern. Tara told him.

"First trip to the gay city of New Orleans?"

Tara nodded politely, a Japanese custom. Never talk unless essentially something of value.

"Just browsing, huh?"

"What you mean browsing?"

"Cruising!"

"What you mean by cruising?"

"Looking for something, Jappy," the man said, as if irritated "Something to do, something to pass the time away."

"No look for something to pass time," Tara said with a deliberate frown. "Me know what me want do. Why you ask, you cop or something?"

The man laughed.

"Hell no, I'm no cop. Down here on my vacation. Got hot nuts tonight, Jappy boy. Like to

crack them on a young stud."

Though Tara was not familiar with American slang, he caught on quickly, as do most Japanese, for they are great imitators, and he vaguely understood the man.

"You fruit-nut or something?"

The man frowned, then tried to laugh it off.

"Fruit—without the nut attached," he said.
"I'd like to suck your cock."

"All Americans like you?" Tara asked, com-

pletely baffled.

The man gave him a quizzical stare.

"I don't get what you mean."

"Every man I talk tonight want to suck cock.

American men no like women?"

"You're all mixed up, kid," the man tried to explain. "Some of them like women. You're just in the wrong town, in the wrong section. This quarter has more queers in it than Pershing square, Fire Island, you name it. And I'm adding one to their army. Came down here looking for something new, something fresh off the farm. Nothing here but burned out faggots and hustlers. I hate a fucking hustler."

"Me fresh," Tara said, advertising, when he wasn't aware he was advertising. He was merely stating a fact, one of which he was proud.

"What's your price?"

"Twenty dollar."

"Twenty!" the man stormed, rolling his eyes. "You must be fresh or either hung like a

stallion! Twenty dollars. My God!"

"Take it or leave it," Tara said, with the directness of a man selling a loaf of bread. "Got to make lots money—find father, start new life in America."

"Father?" the man rasped, giving him the once over, his huge eyes burning into Tara. "You don't need to find your father!" His gaze went to Tara's groin. "I'll take it. My lungs are

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on come starvation!'

The man took him to the Roosevelt Hotel. It was plush, Tara thought, and when he had soaked himself in hot fluffy suds for over an hour, trying vainly to wash away the odors of the fat man and the liberties he had taken with his body, the man rapped impatiently on the door.

"You don't have to wash that much, Jappy! Hell, I'm not that particular! Like em to smell a

little, like real he man!"

Tata dried himself off and went into the bedroom where the tall man lay on the bed naked. He was smoking a cigarette, and watched as the smoke lazily climbed to the ceiling. At the sight of Tara he snuffed it out, and motioned for him to come over.

"Straddle my shoulders," he said, as he

slipped lower down on the bed.

Tara obeyed, and watched curiously as the man slipped his prick into his mouth and worked his tongue round and round it. He then put his balls into his mouth, one at a time, and pulled on them until Tara let out little gasps of pain. Then he went back to his prick, nibbling, kissing the head, tightening his lips like a vise at the ridge around the head, locking his mouth to his prick, like a coupling machine. Then, in a frenzy, he sucked at his pubic hair, taking the long black strands between his lips and pulling madly, until his pubic hair was wet, slick with saliva. Then, lifting Tara's body by his spread thighs, he thrust his tongue into his rectum, pulling then, with hands of steel, Tara's buttocks down over his face, almost burying his face completely in the silken flesh.

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He let out tiny sighs of delight, breathing heavily, his lungs heaving and Tara, overcome with desire, took hold of his own prick and began to jack himself off. When he was ready he let out a signal and the man stuck his face out desperately, his mouth gaped open, and caught the sperm, licking, sucking like a suction cup until all the sperm had been syphoned from Tara's enormous prick.

"You're hot stuff, boy," the man said with a satisfied sigh. Fifteen minutes later and Tara was back on the streets. He had fifty-five dollars now, made in less than half the night, and with a sense of debased pride he folded it together neatly and thrust it into his watch pocket of his jeans.

He crossed from St. Charles over Canal street, hurrying frantically, for on this wide, well-lighted street he knew cops roamed incessantly, and onto Royal again. The Vieux Carre was the tourist section, and he felt safer there. Anxious to get to the circus grounds and find work, he tried to remember the directions the fat man had told him, but they were too foreign for his head to remember, so he decided to take a cab.

In the quarter he noticed that there were few cars. People walked in the streets as much as they did on the sidewalks, and finding a cab proved difficult. Finally impossible. He decided to walk. The chimes on the St. Louis Cathedral struck eleven. He hoped to make it by dawn. He continued down Royal, slowing down at the shop windows, but keeping in the black shadows as much as possible. He tried not to act conspicuous, kept his broad shoulders erect, his legs

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rigid, walking straight, almost military fashion.

Men he passed on the street turned and stared, some women. Some of the men winked, some of them stuck out their tongues, rolled it around their lips, wantonly. Others stopped him and asked point blank could they suck his dick. Several tried to engage him in conversation, asked him to go riding, one wanted to take him to a movie.

Hungry, he went into a little well lighted cafe directly off Royal. It was called the "Coffee Pot." He ordered a hot meal of Southern fried chicken, which he had never eaten, and a glass of tea. While he waited he played the jukebox: Vaya Con Dios, Casino Royale, Wade in the Water. A man sidled over, took out a quarter, waited until he had selected. He was young, good-looking, Tara thought. A riot of soft blond hair, pale blue eyes that sparkled merrily; what Tara considered the ideal American type, if there was any such thing.

"I see you like the Tijuana brass," he said to

Tara, obviously only making conversation.

"They big favorites in Japan," Tara answered. "All Japanese girl go for Trini Lopez and Herb Alpert."

"Is that a fact?" the boy returned. "What about the Japanese boys, do they go for Trini

and Herb too?"

"Everybody like," was Tara's repty.

They were silent for a moment, as each stud-

ied the records.

"My name's Terry," the boy said finally, introducing himself. Tara told him his, and they shook hands, man-fashion. "I happened to no-

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tice that you have ordered a meal. I've ordered one too. If you don't object could I join you?"

"Of course, of course," Tara cried, really overjoyed at the chance of conversing with someone presentable and likable. Then he gave the boy careful scrutiny, noticed how well he was dressed, how neat and clean he looked. He noticed too that he was extremely well built, broad of shoulder, huge of hands, very clean, expressive hands, and he moved with an inner grace Tara envied.

When the meal was ready they sat down together, and Tara told him his intentions, why he had come to America, finding conversation free and easy-going with this Terry. He ended up telling him everything.

"I'm sure they'll hire you at the Circus of the Flowers," the boy said, when Tara had finished talking.

"The Circus of the what?" Tara questioned, his mouth full of chicken.

"After the flower children," Terry explained.

"All the tents are brightly colored, and shaped like the petals of flowers. It's very beautiful... looks very Japaneseee!"

They both laughed at that, and much of the unrest and uneasiness slipped from Tara's mind as he talked to this interesting boy, and ate the most delicious chicken he had ever eaten.

"Me think have this everyday to eat," he said, rubbing his stomach. "Very delicious—very delicious!"

"That's what the south's famous for," Terry said, with pride. "Southern fried chicken, beautiful women, and handsome men."

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"You very handsome, Terry," Tara praised honestly.

"Thanks. So are you, Tara. That's why I went over and talked to you . . . just to look at you."

"You never see Japanese boy before?"

"Oh, a few," he shrugged. "I see them at the flower Circus all the time."

Tara looked at him with surprise, his black eyes glittering.

"Japanese people at the circus?"

"Sure. In fact, one of the most dangerous and thrilling aerial acts I have ever seen out there is done by a Japanese boy, and is he handsome. Lets see—whats his name? Jun Suzuki ... or something like that."

"Maybe this Suzuki give me job," Tara cried

with elation, his hopes soaring.

"He just might," added Terry." and there's several oriental cafes and lounges out there on the beach. Dan's International, and the House of Lee, and that other one, where the Japanese boy does female impersonations... the Golden Lantern."

"My uncle temale impersonator at the Kabukiza theater in Tokyo," said Tara with great pride.

"Oh," Terry replied. "I've heard on that.
Maybe that's where you get your striking good

looks, your poise, your grace."

"Maybe," Tara shrugged, boyishly.

"You know, Tara," said Terry, as if m deep thought, "I was just thinking. This is Friday. I'm off from work until Monday. I sell sporting goods out on Mirabeau Avenue. My car is in the shop tonight, will get it out in the morning. If

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you're not in too great a hurry, we could catch a cab, go out to my place tonight, and in the morning when I get my Thunderbird I'll drive you out to the circus; maybe can help you get on." He paused, his voice a tremor. "After all, you are new in town, and I'm free."

Tara smiled a broad smile, thankful he had run into someone so nice, remembering with acid disgust the others he had met since his arrival.

"Me think good idea, Terry."
Terry smiled pleasantly.

"I'll call a cab then."

Terry lived on Bancroft Drive, facing Bayou St. John and the City Park. He was single, lived alone, and Tara immediately loved his place, a white Spanish stucco interior with all the latest mod furnishings. Everything black and scarlet against the startling white walls, clean and fresh as a dew-drenched lily, smelling of soap and cologne.

Terry fixed two goblets of claret, played Kostelanetz' Sounds of Today on his hi-fi, and they went to bed.

It was the most sumptuous bedroom Tara had ever seen. Red and black, with one touch of emerald: an enormous glass ashtray. Even the bedlamps were red, throwing crimson shadows over the white stucco walls, the scarlet silk spread, the thick, red-piled carpet.

Without reluctance nor embarrassment, Terry immediately stripped off his clothes, and went about the room completely naked, much to Tara's surprise, for he had considered him overly modest. But there was something about Terry's nude body under the red lights that he could not

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describe, nor name, something which attracted his attention to him immediately, and he could not take his eyes from him.

Tara had never remembered seeing a blond male, completely in the nude, and therein lay the mystery, the allure. Terry was blond from the top of his curly head to his toes, his body thick, hard of muscle, and utterly without scar or blemish. His pubic hair was also blond, a mat of thick, wiry curls which enhanced his gargantuan prick and huge nuts bulking so massively in the hollow of his hairy thighs.

His supple nakedness affected Tara in a way he could not explain. Something sexual, his blondness an intriguing contrast and-since opposites attract, Tara's eyes devoured his nakedness with longing, almost with ferocious, sexual desire. He thought Terry's body beautiful, almost a thing of poetry and, when they lay down side by side, he could feel the radiance of the blonde's body warmth, a glowing warmth, almost like the little coal furnaces back home.

Tara was so weary, the sheets were so silky, so clean, so unlike the hard canvas bunks aboard the Yoshinosau Maru, and he felt so clean and pure and wholesome—once again—in this beautiful room, so far removed from the stench of the fat man, the lean one in the Hotel Roosevelt licking his balls, his behind; so secure and safe beside this boy who, to Tara looked like one of the blonde idols from Greek mythology.

He dozed, slept soundly, basked in Terry's strong, forceful nearness, his glowing warmth. Then he awakened as though he willed it, he snuggled close to Terry, curled up in a ball; felt

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Terry's strong, hard arm go around him; felt almost willingly, desirably, Terry's groin pressing hard into his buttocks. Then, as if he had undergone a physical change ... like his uncle Tara Rasha transforming himself from man to woman in a matter of seconds ... so did Tara change in relation to himself. He was wanting Terry with a passion equal in suddenness and force, but different in quality. He was sufficiently fastidious to recoil from dirt, as with the fat man, the lean one. Yet, in spite of all these other things, however deplorable, he was feeling such elation lying in Terry's strong arms, such springing rapture, and he felt vaguely that, as his emotion was growing stronger, his ways of expressing it must increase in correctness, and this puzzled and frightened him a little. Yet not enough that he dared push away the arm which held him so snugly, nor Terry's hot lips that were now above his willing, upturned face, as they pressed lovingly onto Tara's; as his lips, molten now, parted, and he felt the softness, the pleasure of Terry's tongue slipping over his tongue, in between his teeth.

Suddenly, borne upon this melody, this impossible dream, something happened in Tara's brain. It was the realization of life in relation to self. It was marking the end of his childhood. In Terry's strong arms, engulfed in his warm, passionate kisses, entwined in his glorious, muscular legs, immersed in the hollow of his beautiful thighs, Tara no longer was throned above life and fate, as is an innocent child. He was now a part of it. He was mutable and mortal.

Whatever he had been to the fat man, the lean

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one, the drunk one in the alley pleading to lick his prick; whatever he felt, if anything but loathing for them, self-hatred, he felt something of ecstasy now, a rapture in living he could not fathom or name.

He was changing, in both body and mind, already changed. And automatically, instinctively, he lifted his arms, coiled them around Terry's smooth shoulders, returned his kisses.

Then, as if guided by the strong hands on his body, willed to do as they wished, he was being turned over on his stomach. An instant more and Terry's hard, powerful body, like a dark ferocious force, was upon him. He felt his thighs being borne apart, and oh, how blissfully did Terry do this! Tara felt Terry's enormous staff penetrating him, far up into his rectum with that one, deliberate thrust, as pain, glorious but monstrous, engulfed his whole body, running like fantastic fires into and through every vein, to the tips of his straining fingers, to the tips of his stiffened toes.

He was giving himself to Terry, this god come down from Mount Olympus to woo him, seduce him, and he was giving himself willingly. How odd that he should be thrilled by a coarse, hard-muscled man riding him, thigh on thigh, but-tocks uplifted, pivoting, swaying, hopeful of thrilling him, locked together by Terry's hard prick, to become unjointed only when Terry willed it; only when he had had enough of Tara's warm, glowing ass, only when he was through and spent.

He knew one thing. Terry knew how to screw! And he sensed, almost with pangs of jealousy,

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how he could have thrilled a female, for his body moved with the regularity of clockwork, never faltering, never swerving from its rhythm, its machine-like syphoning and drilling, sucking in and out with the wild and erotic music of sex. The sweetest of all rhythms.

That Tara longed to satisfy this male was unmistakable. He wanted to with the ultimate drive of his whole being, the sexual music of his existence; wanted, as no woman could have wanted for he too was woman now. In fact, more than woman, fulfilling the role of woman while yet a man, a most glorious, elated state. He was both Terry's prize and his mistress, his lover and friend. And Tara felt a rudimentary kind of love for Terry and his body as he felt the hard weight of the blonde's forceful nature, his demanding personality driving Tara's own wriggling body farther and farther into the soft mattress. Surrendered was what Tara had done and, through his surrender, was giving the most wonderful thing one person could give to another, the wanton boon of the body; the pleasure man seeks and finds in the body, as Terry was seeking and finding; fulfilling with sharp, piercing pinpricks of pain, a joy Tara gave gladly through pain, for there is sweetness in pain if given as intended.

He could feel, and could also see with the eyes of his mind, Terry's gargantuan prick slipping up into the dark cave of his rectum, sliding on its belly like a serpent curiously invading a stygian cave, its enormous red head, inflamed, mush-rooming out as the hollow of his rectum became proportionally larger within, Terry's prick growing to fit snugly into the hollow, searching

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blindly, recoiling, withdrawing almost competely, bringing on a hot sensation at the lips of his rectum, then forcefully far into him again, each time deeper, more painful, each time swelling to almost bursting. Then in the true glory of what the male is intended to be. Tara felt the hot sperm explode within him, deep, darkly within him. He felt it gush forth, like a broken dam, a tide of molten nectar pulsing into him like the glowing radiance of love. He felt Terry's body go limp, all weight now in that warm limpness, heard him let out a satisfied moan, felt his own body being turned over, felt Terry's protective arms going around him, bulging with springing muscles; pulling him tightly close; felt Terry's warm, saliva-coated lips siphon the nectar out of his own wanton, parted lips.

"Your first time?" Terry asked, stroking his black hair back out of his eyes, from his brow.

"Yes," Tara answered dreamily, and he began to sob with a strange, inner happiness he was unaware he felt, or had ever felt, up to this rapturous moment.

Terry sighed.

"You were wonderful." And he added, kissing Tara again and again on the face, the brow, the lips, warmly, without passion. "I want to do it again, Tara. Lots of times. You're what I want—promise?"

"You can have me when you want me," Tara said, as the words came to him willingly, auto-

matically, instinctively.

"Thank you. Thank you very much for saying that," Terry replied, his voice a murmuring whisper close to Tara's ear. And he gave him a

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fierce hug, as their bodies blended like hot wax. "I don't usually do things like this, not that I'm trying to say I like only women. But tonight ... tonight when I saw you standing in the glow of those colored lights on the jukebox I had to have you, knew you would be like this."

"Me like you too, Terry," said Tara meaningfully, basking in the way Terry caressed his body, made love to him, like a man would make love to a beautiful woman he adored. "Me be

Henna for you, always."

"I'm so fed up with New Orleans, the quarter," Terry went on, his face snuggled close to Tara's. "The same old thing every weekend. Out cruising for something no one else has pawed over, hoping to meet someone nice, goodlooking, clean, and not a hustler. God! How I hate hustlers! And there are more of them in this town than anywhere else in the United States."

"You think me hustler?"

"No, Tara. You couldn't be a hustler. You're too nice. Too fine. Too innocent. You're fresh, never been touched."

A lump came to Tara's throat. He was deeply remorseful now that he had committed sexual acts with the three lousy Americans, now that he had met and given himself freely to Terry. In quiet, carefully-chosen words, each heightened by a gap of silence, he told Terry about the three men; the fat one in the rancid room, the drunk one begging to lick his prick, the lean, wealthy one in the hotel.

"Me had to, Terry, honest. Me had to have money, need bad."

Terry was silent for a moment. He sat up on

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the side of the bed, got a cigarette, lit it, and just sat for a while smoking calmly.

"Well—they didn't screw you in the behind,

did they?"

"No put dick in ass, Terry, honest."

The blonde smiled a half-smile.

"Well, baby, that still makes you a virgin in my eyes." He paused, studied the walls eaten up with the glowing red light. "I suppose some boys down on their luck will take money, like you had to do. But some boys hustle because they want to, Tara, because they are so trifling lazy they had rather sell their ass than work. And that kind I hate."

"But me work, Terry, honest," was Tara's ready reply. "Me not lazy. Me not sell ass again, never. Just give for you—your ass now, Terry Blanche. Whole body belong you."

Terry turned at that, gave him a warm look,

then patted him on the cheek.

You're a good boy, Tara, and I'm glad we've met, got together. I don't have to go looking for someone now, out prowling the streets like one of those miserable, nervous faggots. I'm all man, Tara, really. I swim. I play golf. I hunt. I ride horses, and I box a little. But I do like to screw a hot, tight ass, and I can't help what I like. You're perfect for me. You're a real hunk of candy."

"My ass hot and tight, Terry?"

"So hot and tight I want seconds," Terry said and, swinging his legs up, he snuffed out his cigarette, and mounted Tara again, this time with less intensity, but with a slow, deliberateness that carried them through the balance of the

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night and into the pink streaks heralding dawn. He was still going at it strong when the paperboy tossed the morning *Picayune* on the tile landing, making their hearts beat more rapidly, and they broke out in a cold sweat.

When Terry was through he went out and brought his car back, a tan Thunderbird convertible, and after breakfast he drove Tara over to the circus.

It was located along Pontchartrain Beach, between Lakeshore Drive and the Milneburg Light; intermixed with the permanent amusement park.

The main tent, some 180 by 430 feet, resembled an enormous sunflower edged in skipper blue, sprawled over twelve acres of land. Smaller tents, also like gargantuan flowers, rose near the main one, and banners of every color in the spectrum fluttered everywhere. Billboards, advertising the spectular events, made a zig-zag fence almost completely around the circus, and wagons and cages on wheels and goldleafed bandwagons filled in the areas between the tents; some of them bogged down in sawdust and mud, some of them with wheels off, mounted on trestles and bales of hay.

Tara immediately loved the sight of the place, with the many bright, day-glow and black-light colors, the bright new tents, the smell of saw-dust, hay, popcorn, candy, and animals. When Terry had parked, they surveyed the area, petting the Shetland ponies and huge draft horses that pulled the bandwagons when they had parades. They paused to talk to the clowns in white make-up, saw the doll-like midgets, the freaks,

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the crewmen, the caged chimpanzees, the beautiful grey Percheron horses with scarlet plumes on their heads, the lions in their gaudily painted wagon-cages. They learned the circus had 51 acts running over three hours, put on by 23 performers of 26 nationalities, ably assisted by 140 horses, 40 elephants, 20 lions, and countless other animals. They also learned that the circus had three rings, the center one painted a

bright purple, for the star attraction.

Such performers as the Unus balancing genius had played here, not to mention the sensational Yacopi troupe, Helmuth Gunther, the great Wallenda troupe, the bicycle artists, the Frie-Yacopi troupe, Helmuth Gunther, the great had its own menagerie as well, a mammoth multi-million-dollar colection advertised as "the greatest collection since the deluge." There was a freak side show, and one depicting in miniature the history of the circus. There were 18 pet zebras which roamed the grounds freely, a tribe of Ubangis, a beautiful male Siberian tiger on display at the entrance...the symbol of the circus. The big show maintained a complete brass band, had a cooking tent, a tent for the manufacture and design of costumes, a tent for equipment repairs, bannerlines that lit up at night automatically, carpenter shops and sail loft. The employees included sailmakers, sign painters, carpenters, lettering artists, and mechanics, seamstresses, make-up experts, cooks, doctors and nurses-besides the freaks and the performers. An army of color and glitter, an army that never was on the march, an army that never moved, but set up here for many years now

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a permanent bivouac, the strangest of all armies, and the most fantastic, the most exciting.

Tara was filled with elation. He was like a kid bouncing along, kicking up sawdust, stuffed on popcorn, cotton candy, candied apples, and hamburgers Terry had bought for him. They ate lunch in the cook-tent by the invitation from one of the gaudy clowns, and hung around the grounds until two o'clock, the time for Tara's appointment with the aerialist Jun Suzuki.

Near the picket line where were strung the beautiful Percheron horses, Terry paused, laying one hand on the nearest horse's mane. He gave Tara a long, thoughtful look.

"Tara, I don't want to lose you now, remember. I want you to belong to me, understand? I want us to be together as often as we can."

"Me remember, Terry," said Tara seriously, squinting at the glaring sun. "Me no forget—never."

"But you know what I mean when I say I want us to be together often?"

"Sure, Terry Blanche. You want to screw me in ass. Me no forget."

"But—but, suppose," Terry stammered, nervous near the end. "if you get to really liking it here, meet other Japanese friends, maybe that Jun Suzuki, you won't go high brow on me, will you?"

"Me no high-brow, Terry. Me always same. Don't worry. You worry too much."

Terry tried to laugh, but failed miserably. He glanced at his watch.

"It's time for your interview, Tara. Can I

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string along? I've always wanted his autograph anyway. Maybe that will break the ice."

Tara grinned, glad that Terry wanted to come along.

"Sure."

They made their way then through the main tent, under the enormous yellow flower. The three rings were empty, the seats empty, the ropes leading to the guide wires still, lifeless under the hot canvas. They stood for a moment in the center ring, looking so small, so diminuitive as they gazed up at the remote loft.

"Its so big! So high!" Tara breathed, wonder-

ingly, spreading his arms out, then up.

Looks bigger in here than it does from the outside," Terry put in, himself awed by the gargantuan interior, the blue and yellow canvas through which the sunlight dimly streamed.

Tara stood on tip-toe, made a graceful bow,

then cried: "Da Da te de!"

"Dreaming of being the star performer?"

Terry asked, smiling a warm smile.

"Maybe me be big star someday," Tara said, swelling his chest, his muscular arms extended, as if, to his ears alone, there came the crash of symbols, the thunder of drums, the wild applause. "Maybe someday, Terry, you come see me perform way up there in the air, do death defying spins, walk wire maybe with sword in teeth."

"I doubt that," came a deep, masculine voice from the rear exit, as both Tara and Terry turned simultaneously.

It was Jun Suzuki.

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## Chapter Three

When Tara first glimpsed Jun Suzuki, he thought him the most majestic, and the most handsome Japanese he had ever seen, and that impression never altered nor, even during their most intimate moments, did he find Jun with fault; he was a remarkable individual.

Jun Suzuki, mercifully, did give Tara a job, after he had looked him over thoroughly, and had probed him with myriad questions ... a job as his personal servant. This did not degrade Tara's superior self-image in any way. No one could ever make him feel inferior. But for three days and three nights he did absolutely nothing, ate with the other work hands in the cooktent, slept on the piles of golden hay in the horse tent, admiring with a tinge of male desire, the stallions with their gargantuan pricks and beautiful round balls which bounced excitingly each time they moved, however slightly. On the fourth day Jun Suzuki sent Tinker the midget to fetch Tara to his dressing room and living tent.

Eagerly, almost at a run, with the midget galloping at full pace, Tara made his way to the beautiful orange tent which glowed radiantly in the afternoon sun. He went in reluctantly, breathlessly parting the flap which opened into Jun's dressing area.

The aerialist was standing in the center of the

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tent, surrounded by an array of the most beautiful costumes Tara had ever seen. They were of every hue in the rainbow—dazzling to his eyes. Jun was dressed out in a white tank suit very similar to those swimmers wear; the straps going over his broad shoulders allowing the display of his dark, mahogany colored nipples. Jun fairly glowed, he was like gold, his complexion as smooth, as golden as honey in the sun, and he held himself with such a regal air, so grandly, he seemed to Tara like a personage of royalty.

Tara had observed with fascination a number of the Samurai counterparts, had seen them working out naked at the national sports center, at the beach festival body-building contests, at Kanagawa, at body displays at the Mitsukoshi theatre, at Shibuya Public Hall, and at White Beckgrounds, but none of them had contained in their essence of masculinity the good looks, virility, vigor, and the symbolic carriage of sex as did this mighty, daring Jun Suzuki.

He was a young, powerful god in the lad's eyes, from the first moment he laid eyes on him, and Tara saw no reason to change his opinion. He devoured the magnificent physique with curious eyes, studying Jun from head to toe in a single glane, missing nothing.

The hair on Jun's head was as black as midnight, cut short, as in the traditions of the athlete. His eyes were heavenly blue or, what Tara considered festival silk blue. Like Tara, there was no hair on Jun's body with the exception of his armpits, long black wiry hair which bristled attractively and showed plainly even when his arms were hanging by his side; and about his

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crotch which Tara had not yet had the luck to observe. But he longed to, in that initial glance, for where the whiteness of the tank suit went over Jun's crotch, an enormous bulge protruded sensuously, and that bulge made Tara tremble frantically. Now that he had had a taste of man, the male, had experienced just enough to want more, he knew, felt with a molten outspring of ferocity, that he wanted Jun Suzuki sexually.

"You may start work today," Jun said, eyeing Tara with an air of disdain, like a god looking down on a mortal peasant. "I'll give you the rules once, and you must obey them explicitly. Are you prepared to hear them, or have the noises of the animals you have bedded with

stifled your hearing?"

"Me ready to hear," Tara said obediently, slightly bowing from the waist, in ancient re-

ligious custom.

"First: don't say me. You're in America now and, though you may still keep your Japanese customs, no one here says me instead of I. I did this, I did that ... not me did this, me did that ... understand?"

"Yes, master Jun Suzuki."

Jun turned the hard blue eyes on him.

"And do not refer to me as master. My fellow workers will laugh at me. I am not royalty, though I am the star performer. There is no rank in the circus world. The highest paid star has to pitch in and do manual chores as does the lowest paid rope cat...understand?" Tara nodded awed by the magnificence of this lordly creature.

"The owner of the circus here, as in all circuses, is referred to as the Governor; the stars

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are called Spangle Prats. Elephants, whether male or female are called bulls. Everyone has a nickname here, from the sledge gangs to the highest star, so call them by that. The legal adjuster is called the Patch. Harness makers are called Waxy, and many more you will learn in time... Side Wall Fatty, Quack Quack, Silk Sock Shorty, Buggy Stump, Stud Horse Slim, Kid Glove Kingston, and many more, understand?"

"Me-I understand, Jun Suzuki."

"You are to be my personal servant. You are to mend my costumes, keep my make-up in proper order, see that my private clothes are clean, my living quarters tidy, immaculate in fact. I detest dirt. In time I will train you to be my rope-man, will give you pointers about the rigging, may some day include you in my act. You seem agile, fit, flexible. Do you understand?"

"I understand, Jun Suzuki."

"And more rules of the circus. Be clean and neat in dress and avoid, by all means, loud display. Everybody in the circus is henna one way or another, and they detest advertising! Breakfast will be over at 9:15, lunch at 12:45. In the cook tent remain outside the guide ropes until the blue flag is raised. Do not bring liquors or intoxicants into the dressing rooms. Do not sit cross legged on floats or tableaux wagons when we have "walk ins." Do not nod nor speak to acquaintances in the audience. Male performers are not to visit the ballet girls. Do not take strangers into dressing rooms. Remain outside the big tent until time for your act or assistance.

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The excuse or accidental meetings will not be accepted. This is the circus world, and I live by it with my every muscle, my every breath. I live circus. I eat circus. I sleep circus, and I shall expect you to do the same."

He then moved closer to Tara, so close he could feel the hot radiation of his body, and

placed his hands on his shoulders.

"We are both Japanese. Let us not forget that. I want and expect us to be friends. Loyal, trustworthy, living to the ultimate for the other's happiness and goodwill. So I will tell you now, so that for as long as you remain with me you will know and understand, and will ... MUST ... obey my own personal rules. Do not mix too much with the circus employees, the rigger men, the sledge crews, and above all else the stars. They want their privacy. The circus is a sex field, and everyone is clamorous for thrills: cheap, quick, in between acts, and of any and every form, Living together, mixed with the animals, somehow man develops a sexual mania. Avoid the blonde Swede Niles Klauser and Samson the giant. He is a sex maniac. The Governor caught him one day fucking one of the Shetland ponies. For bodily relaxation I will school you in the ways of sex. That is part of your job, to give me sexual pleasure. As I said, I am dedicated to circus, and have little time for searching out diversions. So you must be available whenever I want you, and you must always comply and never complain. From this moment on you will share my quarters, so that you will be near at all times, for whatever reason I will have need of you...understand?"

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"Yes, Jun Suzuki," Tara said, feeling something of triumph and happiness that this stalwart personage was making of him so close, so essential a servant. "I hope I please you, Jun Suzuki, and do my work well."

"Pleasure stems from the heart, Tara Akira," Jun said, his voice melodious. "In time, you will grow to love me, and will seek out my adoration."

Tara sensed already that this was true. From the moment he first met Jun Suzuki he had longed to belong in some special intimate way, wanted to be a part of his elevated magnificence, a part of his glittering, spotlighted world. He wanted, without knowing why, without caring why, to be essential to Jun's happiness, his success.

So during the balance of the day, Tara could hardly wait until bedtime, or until the time Jun needed him and called him to the soft scarlet silken bed which stood in one corner of the orange tent.

That night he stood in the canvas wings and watched Jun perform on the highwires. Watched in awe. The man was magnificent. If he had been a god to Tara on the ground he was now a demi-god in the air, in those frightening heights which glittered, dazzled him like the stars.

Jun was like a beautiful flaming bird of paradise circling beneath the enormous yellow flower, a fiery creature from some other time, some other world, his perfect body, completely nude except for a jeweled loin sling, darkly sensuous, his gold covered flesh shimmering like the purest marble.

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When he rigger-men lowered him to the golden sawdust, he posed for a striking moment in the center of the purple ring, as the roaring of applause caused a tidal wave of sound. At that cue, Tara ran out with his emerald and purple robe, draped it smoothly over Jun's shoulders, and followed behind as he made his way like a king from the ring and out of the big tent.

Though the applause still made a constant roar, like the ebb and flow of an enormous sea,

Jun quickly hastened to his quarters.

"Never linger," he said to Tara who followed like a lap dog on his heels. "Keep your mystery. Give them but a glimpse, a wisp, a semblence of yourself, as if you may be invisible... a tiny note of music, then that is all. They will always cry for more!

With eager, burning eyes Tara watched him take off his makeup, the blue shadow from around his eyes, the long black pencil lines which enlarged them, the brown outline around his lips. He knew something about cosmetics himself, having watched his uncle applying grease paint and fantastic kabuki wigs for classic drama. Jun was a master, as with everything he said or did. He could do no wrong in Tara's admiring eyes. Jun was the ultimate of the dreams Tara had of sublime manhood, the essence of the mighty Samurai. And when he flying, high up in that lofty world of spotlight and dazzle, he was male personified; all that the male should be in lonesome, aloof meancholy beauty, in strength, daring, courage. Jun was everything to him, and Tara trembled when in his presence, as he would have trembled before the great Buddha in the

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Todayi Temple of Nara. For one was no more or less a god than than the other.

"I feel especially festive tonight," Jun said, as he took a clean towel which Tara handed him obediently and wiped away the remaining face paint. "My muscles are tense. I need to relax. I need you to massage me, until I am back in tone."

"Anything you wish," Tara said, and he meant this profoundly. He helped Jun out of his costume, his fingers tremulous as he unhooked the strands of pearls which came out from the center of his chest like silvery spider-webs. Then, his breath coming in short, jerky gasps, he bent and unfastened the ruby clip at his crotch, peeling the green-sequined material back and through the fork of his legs and to his behind, where it had to be unfastened again. The brief fell into his hands with a rustle of sequins and pearls, and he all but fainted at Jun's bold nakedness. His behind resembled two rounded, softly-browned buns, as smooth as watered silk, and maneuvering to his front, Tara fell back in a welter of emotion at his tremendous prick. It hung so rich, so massive there in its field of black wiry hair, hair like the strands on the Kabuki wigs, straight, fanning out like bristles, The hair grew profusely almost to his dimpled navel, and spread out on each side of his prick and lay attractively along his flat groin. His prick was dark, savagely dark, glowing with warmth, or Tara thought so, hanging ripe and swollen, as did his nuts in their thin sack of silken skin, like rich melons matured and mellow, soft, warm to the touch. Seeing Jun's maleness he instantly

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thought of the beautifur Lippizan stallion, how his enormous prick had unfurled, how his nuts had hung so loosely in their sling.

Jun then lay back on the soft, silky bed and, by his instructions, Tara began to rub him down. At first, his shoulders, his glowing arms, under his armpits where the hair grew so wildly, his

chest, then his enormous thighs.

"It feels so wonderful," Jun said, as Tara's fingers pressed into the muscles of his inner thighs, then rubbed ferociously around his calves, his ankles, his toes, taking each individually and massaging it thoroughly. "T've needed this, Tara Akira, someone like you, with hands like yours, hands like a surgeon's, to keep me toned down. Flying is so tense, so demanding of every nerve. And I must be loosened..all over..understand...every inch of me."

Tara nodded, as a lump rose to his throat, a pain both agonizing and thrilling, as touch by

touch he explored Jun's wonderful body.

He could not stop his wondering gaze from the area of Jun's exciting crotch, and his hands, unbidden, kept running up his thighs, massaging frantically; his finger tips but an inch from the tremendous balls, the heavily-veined prick which, like a live thing seperated from Jun's body, began to move, making an arc as it grew, swinging around by his thighs, missing Tara's fingers but a fraction, then toward his navel where it stood rigidly, a hard shaft of fleshly hunger and wanton desire.

Jun caught hold of it and shoved it down so that its enormous lava colored head touched Tara's fingers now, which lay still for that pur-

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pose, hopeful of its touch. Tara let one finger go over its head, then two, then his hand, as he cupped the head lovingly. Then, in a frenzy which affected his whole body, his every trembling nerve, he allowed his hand to slide down the full length of it, gripping it firmly, glorified by its throbbing warmth. He could actually feel the throb of it, as though it had a beating heart of its own, like a quivering bird anxious to be set free.

Jun placed his hands behind his head, the hair under his armpits black masses of sexual mystery, touched by the lights of tiny Japanese lanterns glowing like molten gold. He spread his thighs willingly, as Tara slipped his body up between them. Both men were panting now, with drops of sweat beading on their foreheads, in the hollows of their arms, as Tara gripped the huge hard prick jealously, as if it suddenly belonged to him now, his possession, free to do with it as he pleased. And he wanted to do so much!

"It needs massaging too," Jun whispered, his voice hardly audible. "Its been so long—so long. It is as lonesome as I am, Tara Akira. It needs loving, kissing, I've worked so long, so hard, without passion, without giving my body the pleasures it needs, it craves. I've been hard on my body, Tara, for I've been so determined to perefet my act. I want to be the greatest aerialist in the world, Tara, the greatest—greater than Earnest Clark, LaBelle Roche, Lillian Leitzel, or even Nio Niatto or the Riggettis. But I need you tonight, Tara. My prick needs you. It wants you to make love to it, to give it the loving it needs. Oh, Buddha of Todayi, I need to be loved!"

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Tara glanced up at him with deep and willing longing deep in his sexually-hungry eyes, and he whispered lovingly:

"I'll make love to you, Jun Suzuki. I'll turn Henna for you, do whatever you want. If . . . if I can make you happy, I'll do anything, anything that will thrill, that will make you feel love. I will live for you, sacrice everything for you . . . honest."

"Thank Buddha for sending you to me," Jun said in a murmur. "I am under a constant strain. Relax me, Tara. Show me that love, now ,to-night. If you want to love me, kiss it with that love, let me feel that love with your lips going down over it. Let me know you love me by drinking my maleness, the best there is in me. Love me all over, Tara. My body is hungry for your touch, your lips, for the love you give me with your hands, your mouth."

Without hesitation Tara slipped his arms around Jun's groin, coupling with his buttocks. Trembling, the saliva dripping from his lips, he let his mouth slide down over Jun's prick, wound his tongue lovingly around its pulsating head, sucking for several minutes, or a lifetime, then took it all in his mouth, burying his face in the dark mat of black hair, feeling the wiry texture tickling his nose, his cheeks, his eyes. He felt Jun's thighs go rigid in his grasp, heard him let out low, contented sighs as he worked his mouth up and down, loving the bigness of Jun's prick, feeling with his roaming tongue the taut veins, the rim of the head, the opening where the lovely nectar would shoot like the rasping tongue of a lizard. And he must make it shoot. It was his

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duty, and how he loved that duty.. to thrill the mighty Jun Suzuki, make him happy, make him know he had been loved, and loved in return.

In his frightening dreams now, his new male desires, the desire of male for male, the wonder of it, the wild glitter, the vigor, the strength, the bold definition of male pitted sexually against male, his conscience reached out to something he felt must be beyond the pleasant, sensuous; beyond the drip and patter of human destiniessomething vast, solitary, and silent. How could he find, with sexual relief, that which none have ever named or known? Men had only stammered at it in such words as love, sex amour, god! All the outcries of all male creatures, those especially like him, a profound male of such vigor and of such physical perfection that, in admiring other equally superb males, he could be satisfied of his unkowing, strange hungers by coupling with them sexually. He could not get close enough to them, to admire them, to feel their beauty without the other . . . the sex of their fulfillment. And those cries, of both those living and dying, sink in the depths of the male beauty as in an unsounded ocean. The wistful dreams of the male, whose hungers are never quite fulfilled, are haunted by this theme forever. The creeds of men, their desires, ar as so many keys that do not fit the lock. Only his mouth on a male's organ was the key, the key to both peace and terror, for in this way, as he was finding tonight with Jun, in this way he could get close enough to man, to the male, to truly feel the quality of his ferocious force, his dynamic powers, his grave darknesses and his blissful sorrows, his desires,

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his thrills.

Just knowing a male was not enough. He had to touch him, feel his emotional powers. He had to awaken those powers. He had to bring those powers, that male ferocity, to a fevered pitch. He had to feel the climax to that awesome, but sublime beauty, that noble strength, that purity of flesh and muscle, that frantic music of desire.

And in this rapt knowledge, bending his every will do the doing, giving all that was within himself, he flooded ecstasy over Jun's hard maleness, going up and down with his dripping lips until, as they thrashed about like men in a duel, he felt the hot gush of sperm, felt it filling his mouth, like water rushing pell-mell into a drum, swallowed, felt the ecstasy of Jun's manhood slip hotly down his throat, felt his thighs go rigid, felt them then relax, calmed, that calm placidity after the storm of passion, the fulfillment of manly sex.

Such pure liquid, like wine, he sensed, coming from Jun Suzuki's loins, and through this sense of admiration for the gallant man to whom he made masculine, satyric love, Tara relished the taste, the molten fire which had belonged to Jun, sleeping in his healthy groin, until he, Tara, had awakened it, set it into burning motion, set it free.

In the throes of ecstasy, he took Jun's prick out of his mouth, held it caressingly with one hand while he licked away the remaining wetness. Then, lowering his nose to it, he sniffed, sexually aroused by the rich, poignant odor, the smell of male, like the smell of the stallions in the horse tent. Then, not through yet, his every

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nerve inflamed, his every muscle a tremor, he turned Jun over on his stomach, him moving so willingly, and, as the lean man had done to him in the Roosevelt Hotel, having loathed it then, he slipped his tongue up between the round buns of Jun's behind, and into his rectum, lolling it sparingly at first, getting acquainted with the feel, the taste, then deeply, maddeningly deep, as Jun squirmed from the pure ecstasy of it, moving his buttocks back forth, up and down, hoisted his body up so that he rested on his elbows and knees, spreading his cheeks so that Tara could sink deeper, ever deeper into the exquisite male flesh.

There seemed no end to it, as the flesh, so warm, so soothing to Tara's tongue, parted, softly, pliably, as Tara gripped his cheeks with fingers of steel, bedazed in the thrill, sinking, as if eating away the supple flesh, carniverous, a sodomite and, having thrashed his own emotions into a sexual frenzy, he lifted his body, made an attempt at taking Jun's as Terry Blanche had taken him.

Jun, not rudely, but firmly, pulled his hands away and turned over on his back.

"Your duty to me is to give me pleasure, not take it, not to give me pain," Jun said, not angrily or reprovingly but with soft firmness.

"So sorry," Tara murmured, caressing his thighs lovingly. "I couldn't get enough, Jun. I hunger for you, all of you. Did I make you happy?"

"Very," Jun said, placing his hands again back of his head. He stared at the ceiling of the tent. "I felt as though I was lying in the soft

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grass at Deer Park in Kyoto in the warm sun, the sacred deer licking my legs."

"I know," Tara said sadly, dreamily, as he thought of the park, the many times he had gone there in the early spring, when the cherry blossoms drenched the wooded areas with pink. "Hope I make you feel like that always."

At that, Jun lifted himself up, drew Tara to him and kissed him firmly on the mouth. "You my henna now."

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## Chapter

## Four

Wrapped in the glittering, tinsel dominated world of the Circus of the Flowers, Tara basked delightedly.

Everything about the circus he loved: the animals, the color, the bright spangle and glitter, the fantastic costumes, the music, the parades during matinee, the performers with their radiant entourages, the beautiful people, the workhands, even the freaks. He genuinely admired the courage, the daring, the thrills which laced themselves into these colorful people. Beautiful bodies and beautiful minds and beautiful daring!

Too...he loved Jun Suzuki.

No religious fanatic ever bowed to his invincible gods as did he to Jun. No woman ever loved with such devotion and loyalty as did Tara, paying homage to Jun Suzuki. He was as devoted to the star as all his great admiration demanded, loyal to his last drop of blood, and he threw himself into his work, to the strick rules of the circus explicitly, and obeyed Jun as if he had been a walking, talking, breathing Buddha.

Tara made friends easily, became a familiar figure along Clown Alley, a flap tent where the clowns sat in their tiny cubby-holes applying make-up. He could draw a neigh from the beautiful Percheron stallions by merely entering their tent; and hardly a day passed that he did not hear first hand the life story of some sledge gang

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crewman, a cook, one of the cat men, a canvas expert, one of the carpenters, or one of the freaks: Thelma the fat girl, the Lilliputian Princess, the living skeleton Dude, the Tattooed man, the Snake Enchantress, the King of the Dwarfs, the Albino family, the Magician, the Ventriloquist, the Seal Boy, the Scotch Highlanders, and the Spider Man, Blackie, who had four legs. Anytime he wanted extra grub he merely had to wink at the cooks in the cook tent, or to ride one of the Percheron stallions he had only to ask the groom Eiken Lee, or, if he needed needle and thread or a handful of sequins to patch up some of Jun's older costumes he had only to peck Willamina, the circus dressmaker, on the cheek, and for exercise, take on Hotshot in a round of judo.

He liked them all, and they in turn liked him, and were puzzled one day in Clown Alley when one of the clowns, Harry, who never went with-

out his make-up, said:

"You disappoint us, Tara, when you don't come by and pay us a visit more often. We like you, and want you to like us."

"I can't," Tara had cried, feeling self-ridicule at this discovery. "Jun Suzuki is strict. He says

it is not circus to get too familiar."

"Well, he's wrong," Harry said, as he blinked at Tara with his long silken eyelashes which were made of black feathers. "It is circus. We're all one big happy family, and don't you let no one tell you any different. Jun Suzuki is vain..too proud!"

Jun Suzuki was vain. He was proud. And he

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was also celestially magnificent. In Tara's love haunted eyes he could do no wrong. And it seemed almost nightly now, much to Tara's pride and delight, that Jun complained of tenseness of nerves, of strain, and had Tara begin with a light massage and end in an orgy of sex, sucking on him sometimes by the hour, bathing him with his tongue, caressing him, adoring him, making a lot over his good looks, his beautiful body, his sex drive, his physical stamina.

Tara never tired of these whims, which were actually psychic crutches, and he bowed to the inevitable love whims as if Jun Suzuki were a noble prince, a lord to be waited upon hand and foot; and as each night of sexual pleasure led to the next episode, he became so familiar with Jun's body he knew every inch of him by heart, seeing, adoring him when with him, dreaming of him while he worked, while he slept. Never a minute went by that he was not thinking of him, his thrills, his happiness. He sacrificed everything for Jun's sake, for his well being, for his domineering sexual demands.

He became, not only his servant, but his slave, his body slave, his love slave. Everything Jun needed Tara kept ready, right at his fingertips. He stayed at his elbow on the way to the big tent, waited patiently, sometimes with fear, in the wings, then returned with him to their quarters. He bathed him, shaved him, shampooed him, trimmed his finger and toe nails, massaged him, kept his costumes in order, brought his food, laid out his make-up, and saw

to his aerial equipment.

Tara was so apt at this that Jun dismissed his

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two riggermen and put Tara in complete charge of the rigging. He also allowed Tara to go aloft with him, to stand on the platforms to get the feel of the height, the sensation, the balance of moving through the air on tight wire without a net below.

Tara was naturally athletic, and instinctively amenable to anything acrobatic. His body had the dexterity of movement, that easy flow of grace and control so essential to any wirewalker, and he was a willing, eager, and also a cautious pupil.

He listened patiently to Jun's instructions. He learned quickly. And remembered. He was endowed with great animal strength and the boldest of determination. His ambition to gain the highwire and to possess the purple ring became an almost fanatic obession. Though he admired Jun with an adulation only a little less than hero worship, and loved him dearly physically-a homosexual union that was rare, declaring himself a full fledged henna for his hero's sake-he wanted too, with a frantic desperation, to someday out-do Jun on the swings.

Each time he stood in the canvas wings and watched Jun go through his marvelous paces, defying space, height, death for the thrill of an audience's applause, Tara saw himself up there moving through those glittering lights, and not Jun Suzuki. And each time he heard the thunderous applause, the roll of the drums, the spine-chilling music, he pictured himself bowing, whirling the sparkling robe until it made an ever-widening circle around his own handsome, all-but-naked form.

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Tara was born for the circus. Born to chill spines, to wring from the audience a tide of applause unequalled in circus history. All his young life he had, unknowingly, trained for this. For the mighty Samurai had instilled in him the mettle, the drive, the ambition to put his beautiful body where it would be observed to full advantage.

Where else in the world could he show off his good looks, his perfect physique, unless up there in those dazzling heights?

He utilized every extra moment studying the aerialist's technique. He watched Jun making trial runs like a cub watching the maneuvers of its father; the cold ambition and desire filling him with dreams of conquest. Stardust was in his eyes, sawdust in his shoes, and he was suspended somewhere in between, haunted, rapt; with Jun's love, his body to keep him in motion, to galvanize his spirit, to inflame his determination.

"You're driving yourself too hard," Jun said to him one day when Tara had all but outdone him on the vertical rigging. "Patience is a virtue. You will make it . . . in time."

But Tara, though he listened to Jun, with the impatience of youth, wanted to make it now. He worked still harder than before, more determined than ever, and with a wild and bursting heart. His body was in exquisite pitch. He had all the male sex he could devour, sucking on Jun nightly, lying with him after their hot showers, when their bodies were radiant, aglow, and from that sucking, pulling on Jun's loins, relishing the dark ferocity of him, he was, unknowingly, by siphoning out Jun's strength, adding to his own. Na-

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ture was playing the role of magician. From Jun's naked thighs, like an udder filled to the brim with the elixir of life, as in mythology the two babies, Romulus and Remus, suckled their strength from the female wolf, so was Tara—in the dark hollow of Jun's thighs, his mouth coupling with his prick—drawing out his strength, nursing his muscles with the nectar, the life-giving substance of Jun's pure sperm, making Jun weaker, Tara more vigorous.

And with that life-giving substance Tara was also withdrawing Jun's abilities, his capacity for nerveless skill. He was taking away Jun's ambition, and he was doing it with the irresistible drive of Jun's sex.

For the daily matinees there was always staged a prodigious spectacle. Between the quarter poles of the big tent, like a circular avenue, a parade of sorts or a "walk through," was carried out, usually with the band striking up thunderous numbers like "Entry of the Gladiators," or "The Thunderer." Even more frequently, tableaus were presented in all their colorful pageantry. In these pantomime dramas, nursery rhymes were usually the theme, to delight the children of the audience, sometimes Joan of Arc, the Queen of Sheba, Cinderella, Holidays, or Pantos Paradise became the dominant mosiac of color and sound.

In these "walk throughs" everyone in the circus played a part, from the most prominent star to the cook's assistant, each in glittering costume. They merely walked around the avenue between the quarter poles once, slipped out of their costumes (for which purpose waiting atten-

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dants stood to the ready) and then returned to their regular chores.

Luckily, Albert Ostermaier, who was getting in years, and liked Tara immensely, allowed him to ride his white stallion, Doheas. The horse wore magnificent purple and turquoise plumes, a ruby belly band, so Tara stitched up a costume in keeping.

It was the envy of the circus, and infuriated Jun. A sequined crotch-piece of turquoise, and a helmet encrusted with purple plumes which danced maddeningly as Tara sent Doheas through his paces.

"This is not a strip show," Jun stormed, after the matinee was over and he had intercepted Tara in the orange tent. "This is a circus! If you want to put on a strip act go join that female impersonator meko (cat) Japanelle at the Golden Latern!"

Tara was trapped in a welter of disappointment and sudden shame. Dropping to his knees, he clung to Jun's heavy thighs, kissed his crotch through the thin gauze, lay his wet lips over the place where the head was.

"So sorry! So sorry!" he murmured, caressing his naked legs with hands of abiding love. "Never again, Jun. Do what you say, always."

Tara, obediently, kept his word. He never again rode Doheas, and he discarded his flimsy costume, but for some reason, unknown to him, he did not forget Jun's mention of the female impersonator Japanelle. Increasingly now, he cast his every moment into his work, and tried in every way possible to please Jun Suzuki.

Sometimes, when Jun complained about the

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tightness of his nerves, when he came into the orange tent from the last show, the haunting sounds of the band still playing the farewell song, or the theme of the Mardi Gras in New Orleans: "If I Ever Cease to Love," he would fall limply on the silken yoko soba and request Tara's ministrations.

"Suck me! Suck me! he would sigh wantingly, taking Tara by the arm and pulling him down between his spread thighs. "Relax me, Tara, akanboo (baby). Make me go limp. Make me feel like I'm laying in the warm sun in Deer Park, your tongue like the soft tongues of the sacred deer. Cover me, akanboo, with your tongue, soften my hard muscles, lick out the strain, iron out the tightness."

No one except Tara ever knew about this tenseness of nerve, for in the public eye Jun was always the height of reserve, his every movement, his every attitude was that of a monolithic confidence in himself. No one would have guessed, nor dared to guess, that Jun was any-

thing but the essence of placidity.

But Tara knew, and blamed his love of sex for his recurring condition. To him, Jun was the most male of all men, without weakness or frustration, and Tara obliged his whims with his own undying love, his delight in making passionate love to him, even though at times when Jun had kept him sucking by the hour, his neck ached, and the skin inside his lips peeled until his mouth was raw. But he would go on and on, untiring, until Jun had spermed, and sometimes again afterwards, until Jun fell asleep, or informed him it was enough. Many times Jun

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straddled a chair, with his crotch pinned down tightly over the back rung, causing him to keep only a half-hard while Tara, seated on the bed, would suck him far into the night, and still Jun would be going strong, the sperm at last coming with his prick still in the limber stage. This attitude was of ancient Japanese custom, to prolong sex by tightening the area in the straddle, cutting off the blood vessels, and Tara, admittedly, loved to suck him in this fashion, for he could strip his prick down to the very hilt with his wet tongue, and pull and hunch on Jun to his heart's content.

It was a developed hunger of which neither ever seemed to tire. It never became a thing jaded between them, and both seemed happiest when they were locked together, groping with prick and tongue, as ecstasy was siphoned into Tara's yearning, hungry mouth.

"It never seems enough," Jun said to him one night, when Tara had lain on his belly and had sucked him until he was so weary he could barely move. "As at any moment it is enough, but then—always—is not."

"I want to satisfy you, honest," Tara had said meekly, his heart fluttering at the possibility of losing Jun. "I want to make you happy, Jun. Want you to want me always."

"I'll always want you, Tara," Jun whispered.
"Just relax me. Just relax me."

As their capacity for sex magnified itself, natural jealousies sprang up between them. Not that Tara ever slacked his attentions on Jun. He didn't. No servant ever served a master with such outpourings of devotion. And as Jun's de-

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mands increased Tara became even more attentive with devotion. He hardly if ever ventured out of Jun's speaking range, and when he did he was eager to hurry back, to do some little thing for him he knew Jun would like.

Jun had many demands, and at any hour of the day or night Tara remained on the vigil, expecting to be aroused from sleep to rub his back, to press vigorously between his shoulder blades, to give him an aspirin, water, to soap him down in the shower, sometimes long after midnight, or to accompany him to the high rigging where, while the circus slept, Jun would pivot his body through the air, wearing nothing but a posing strap, driving himself in a frenzy until he became sodden with fatigue, wet with sweat. Then, in total weariness, would pull Tara to him, love him ,kiss him, and cry himself to sleep.

Whenever Tara talked to other members of the crew Jun became furious, at first making plausible excuses that he needed him in the tent, any tiny, trivial thing which would send Tara running to him at full gallop. Then he began to scold.

Terry Blanche, who saw every matinee, insisted on coming to the tent to see Tara and, at first, they had pleasant outings together. Terry drove him everywhere during Tara's hours off, showed him New Orleans, bought him expensive gifts, and always brought him a lavender hothouse orchid. Though they never had sex, Terry seemed to understand when Tara explained to him, "My training is very strict, Terry. Jun Suzuki is making me into a star. Someday I fly on the wires. He says I cannot have sex, no

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smoking, no drinking. Sorry, Terry, but must keep my body in shape."

"That's all right," Terry said, running his hand through Tara's raven hair. "I want to see you in the top swings as much as you do. Just don't quit seeing me, Tara baby . . . please."

"I never quit seeing you, Terry," Tara had promised. They were standing at the entrance to the big tent, and beyond, Tara could see Jun watching them from their quarters. "I must go now, Terry. My boss need me. See you tomorrow at matinee."

Jun was holding the orchid when Tara went into the orange tent.

"These sickly things give me the sleeping sickness," Jun said, as he tossed the orchid on the sawdust. Tara picked it up and placed it back into a vase of water. "Isn't it kind of silly, Tara, one man giving another flowers?"

"Maybe," Tara answered, not looking at him. He was hurt that Jun disapproved of Terry, whom he considered a precious friend, but he could not hurt Jun either.

"American men not like Japanese men, Jun."
Tara said.

"Thank Buddha for that," Jun said, as he slipped on a bright blue kimono. "I hate all American men, hate them every since they invaded Hiroshima, destroyed our way of life, took away our old customs, everything... mamasan, papasan, my brother, my sister, my home ... everything."

Tara looked at him sadly, for he had never heard Jun talk so bitterly.

"Is that why you dislike Terry Blanche so?"

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"You should hate him too," Jun declared, his blue eyes now tiny narrow slits, "You should hate all of them. You are Japanese, Tara Akira!"

"But Terry Blanche very good to me. Look at all these gifts, hi-fi, lanterns, statues of ivory, an orchid every day. How can I hate him, Jun ... how?"

Jun looked at him and his expression mellowed as he said very lowly, very profoundly.

"Aren't I good to you too, Tara?"

Tara looked at him, his eyes filled with hot tears.

"Yes, Jun. You very good to me. I could never ask for nothing better. You nicest person in whole world, honest, I love you, Jun. I always love you."

"Do you?" Jun said. He came to Tara, laid a warm hand on his shoulder, "I don't want you to hate this Terry Blanche. But he is taking up too much of your time. You need every hour you can spare for training. You do want to be a flier, don't you?"

"Sure, I want to be trapeze artist ... you know that, Jun. It's just-just that Terry like me very much. He very good to me. I hate to hurt him."

"He has his own American friends, Tara. He can live without you, I'm certain." He pulled Tara to him, kissed him affectionately on the brow. "How would you like to perform in the matinee tomorrow, without me?"

Tara looked up, his face beaming. "You kidding me, Jun, honest?"

"No, I'm serious. I think you're ready." He held Tara at arm's length. "But you must de-

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vote your every spare hour to this training. No more trips into New Orleans. No more trips to Lakeshore Drive, or to the Amusement Park, or swimming in Lake Pontchartrain, understand?"

"I understand, Jun," Tara said gravely, pouting. "What about Terry. What will I tell Terry?

"You will tell him what I have told you. Your every hour must be circus. If he is your true friend he will understand. It's how bad you want to be an aerialist—what you are willing to give up, what you are willing to sacrifice?"

"I give up Terry," Tara said, blinking back tears.

The next day, and every day from then on, a bouquet of flaming red roses was placed on the table where Tara kept his private belongings. He had used the space as a desk, for writing materials since he wrote to his uncle regularly. A little ivory statue of a naked Samurai, books on body building completed his own private nook. Though there was never a card on the roses, he suspected, or knew, happily, that they were from Jun Suzuki.

Somehow, he would find a way to tell Terry Blanche that he could no longer see him.

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## Chapter

Though Tara's devotion to Jun was genuine, as were his promises, his actions were something else. Young, ambitions, overflowing with vitality and lusts, he could not help but seek out others. And they him. He was not a wildcat, but in a cage he became one, eager to be set free. And it was Jun who had imprisoned him.

In the circus world, where every member looks on every other member as a part of his family, where living together constantly marks them with familiarity, eating, sleeping, sharing baths and toilets, nothing is left secret, nothing is barred, nothing is restricted, every emotion advertised, telegraphed. Strong, healthy menbeautiful, daring women, each independently stuffed tightly with nerve, talent; each balanced, nerveless, on a fulcrum of rules and order, discipline, sacrifice of every pleasure so that their daring performances remain consistently flawless, the ends of their personalities, in time, unravel like a sweater sleeve snagged on a thom. Passions become rampant, emotions stray, as nerves seek release from rigid, repressive discipline.

Tara-young, possessed of a beautiful and desirable body, the natural lure for all the sex-fasters, the sex disciplined—the personification of sex, was engorged by robust passions, gusty good health and constantly inflamed by an atmos-

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phere ripe with enamored philandering.

Sex for the sheer sake of sex and nothing more, permeated the very air. The tacit urge to love anyone or anything (when love is needed and lacking) sucked constantly at Tara.

Too, the malformed freaks of the circus seemed to have an irresistable effect on the perfect, the beautiful. The imperfection of the deformed freaks, nature's oddities, provoked in the beautiful a drive to make the most of their potential, to become lovable and loved, in defiance of the fact of the defeated misshapen. Beauty was one thing, perfection still another, and both seemed as nothing without passion.

In a hemmed-in area of no more than twelve square miles, thronged with animals constantly breeding, constantly replenishing their numbers, the coupling season bringing on the display of organs turgid for satisfaction; a great compound where mammoth cats screamed and tore at one another and elephants trumpeted the mating call, where horses pranced and gnawed at one another, locking in the open for all eyes which cared to notice, man, the real beast among them all, followed suit, lasciviously.

It was on a Sunday, the one day in the week the show closed, the day of rest. Jun had taken a nap, after one of his tense spells. Tara had sucked him until he had fallen asleep, completely spent, and the lad eased out of the orange tent to take a stroll.

Among the many performers in the circus of the flowers whom Tara admired was the master lion-tamer. He dominated twelve beautiful, golden-coated cats, their flanks the hues of

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tawny bronze, ferocious and healthy, and as handsome as Niles Klauser, their owner and trainer.

Tara went by to see him.

He had retired his huge Bengal tigers for the day, each in his own separate cage in a semi-circle around the training ring, and Niles Klauser lay sprawled on a stack of hay in the far corner of the animal tent cuddling a year-old panther.

As the oriental attracts the occidental, so did the occidental attract the oriental.

Niles Klauser was a wheat-colored blond, with a riot of thick curly hair any man or woman would have envied, and the bluest eyes Tara had ever seen; the shade of dense blue seen in the shadows of the snow banks on Mt. Fuji at dawn. He was a huge man, broad of shoulder, thick of arm and thigh, without an extra ounce of fat. He was solid muscle from his rounded shoulders to his calves, hard, heavily veined, rippling with great strength and, like the cats he mastered, at the very peak of health. He was good-natured, laughed a lot, displaying even white teeth with the luminescence of sea shell nacre. His voice was masterful, provocative, luring people into his pleasant, wholesome ways.

"Can I come near?" Tara shouted to him, long before he reached the haystack, for Niles had a way with animals few had, and Tara was not sure the young, silken-coated panther boded him good.

"Sarasota wouldn't harm a fly," Niles assured, as he caught the black panther at the back of the neck and pulled him up into his lap.

"Why do you call him Sarasota?" Tara asked,

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as he warily approached the man and animal on the fine clean hay and sat down with a rustling of the fragrant stalks.

Niles Klauser looked at him and smiled a broad smile.

"Because he was born there, in the Ringling Brothers winter quarters. So I thought it an appropriate name."

Tara dared to move a little closer.

Niles held out one of his furry paws, grinning all the while.

"Here, Tara, rub him if you like. He won't bite you. In fact, bet he takes to you."

Tara reached out, a little nervous at first, and began to stroke his paw, then his backside, watching with fascination how the shiny black hair bristled. Sarasota let out contented growls, almost like a purring kitten, and Tara turned over on his stomach, sprawling comfortably in the hay and pulled the magnificent animal to him affectionately.

"See, Tara," Niles said. "He likes you. Look at him licking your hair." Then he said low, without smiling. "Makes me jealous."

"You shouldn't be jealous," Tara said, misunderstanding him. "I couldn't ever take Sarasota away from you. He loves you to death."

There was silence for a moment, the only sounds that of the panther purring under the loving strokes of their hands.

"I wasn't speaking of Sarasota," Niles said at last, turning his gaze to two of his great cats that were pawing at each other through the bars of their cages. "I think you have beautiful hair, Tara, bet it bristles too when it is stroked."

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"I keep it in good shape," Tara said, unconsciously. "Want to look my best when I make star on high trapeze."

"You'll make it," Niles confirmed, his eyes filled with the bright shine of admiration. "I've watched you, Tara, many times. You have the stuff circuses are made of. You're star quality. And you have a beautiful body. It will look good up there under the lights."

You think I really make it, Niles?" Tara cried, propping himself up on one elbow. I got to make it! My every dream, my whole world wrapped up in circus."

Niles looked at him, stroked back his black curly hair with a hand that trembled.

"You want circus that bad, Tara?"

Tara answered from the core of his young soul.

"Real bad, Niles Klauser. Real bad. So bad I think the time never come for me to go on high rigging—that I be old man before time comes. That's why I admire you so much, Niles. You great. You daring. I watch you just before Jun come on with his act, watch your muscles bulging when you crack the whip, the way you hold the chair, the way you master the big cats. You're like a god then, Niles Klauser."

Niles looked at him with hard, deliberate eyes,

eyes that burned.

"I never thought you paid that much attention to me, Tara. Or anyone for that matter. You were always so occupied in Jun Suzuki. Following him around like the Burmese trainer follows Pawah the white elephant. You give no one else in the circus the opportunity to know you. I find you very pleasing. Joys and pleasures are very

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few here, all our time undividedly on work, not play. I have sought you out many times, during my lonely moments, and find you always with your oriental companion. You must care for him a iot, in fact a great dear, to allow him to shut out females."

Tara was puzzled to a degree at that, but he answered pleasantly.

"I do like Jun Suzuki, very much. He very good to me. He pick me up, give me home in circus when I know nothing, hungry. He train me for big act. Someday he let me take purple

ring."

"That all sounds very good and very interesting," Niles said. "But I don't think Jun Suzuki would willingly ever move over for anyone else to share the purple ring. The purple ring is the highest honor a performer can receive in the circus world, a real spangle prat, and Jun Suzuki is too proud, too vain, too ambitions and selfish for that station to bestow it on another. There, he is god, and Jun Suzuki wants most in the world to be a god."

This silenced Tara for a brief moment, and he lifted his dark eyes and looked at Niles Klauser really for the first time, noticed how truly blue his eyes were, framed in their dark curling lashes, how bluer still they looked above the blue polo shirt Niles wore, noticed how thick, how muscular were his legs in their riding habit, shiny black riding boots, his wide black belt, his golden hair flocked with strands of hay. He nogolden hair flocked with strands of hay. He nogolden his lips too, red, as shapely as a woman's, ticed his lips too, red, as shapely as if drawn by a keen, firm, outlined as perfectly as if drawn by a red grease pencil. He knew him to be the most

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loyal of people, honest to a fault, trustworthy. The Governor would have turned over the admission cash box to Niles with assurance that it would be kept safe, not a penny missing. And he wondered why he spoke thus of Jun. Tara loved Jun, and hated to hear anyone deprecate him.

"Jun deserves to be a god, as you deserve to be a god," he said then, squaring it off nicely, without offending anyone. "But each in a different way. Jun in the air, you on the ground with your cats."

Niles rumpled his hair, and slapped him playfully on the behind. But he left his hand there, as if unconsciously, rubbing his smooth cheek where the jeans tightened attractively.

"I don't receive such flattery often, Tara. You will give me the big head. Especially coming from someone I like as much as I like you."

"You deserve big head," Tara continued to praise, not minding Niles hand on his behind. In fact, its warmth, its strength, the strength he knew it possessed from watching his hands master the cats in the cage, Tara too felt mastered, felt as though he belonged in some nice way to this giant of a man who wanted to fondle him, who wanted a similar closeness to that he and Jun shared. "You should be king of circus, Niles Klauser, taming all those ferocious tigers, the Bengals, the most dangerous animals in the world. Don't you feel great in there? Don't you feel that you're on top of the world?"

"Hardly," Niles answered, sliding his body through the hay until his enormous thighs brushed those of Tara's. He let one naked arm go

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over his shoulder, rubbed Tara's shoulder blades, his spine, the deep hollow in his back playfully, lovingly, soothingly. "I feel in the cage like a man who may seem cruel to many in the audience. Everytime I pop my whip I feel certain someone in the audience is saying to himself that I have beaten my cats into submission. But this of course is not so, Tara." He glanced up, gazed longingly at his magnificent animals sitting prettily in their home cages. "Unsuspected by most, my wild animal act is fraught with constant danger, real danger. A trainer must know and understand the temperament of each and every beast in the cage. Tigers can never be tamed, Tara Akira, but through patience, understanding and persistence they can be trained."

"What about Sarasota here?" Tara asked, rubbing the animal lovingly as it lay on its back, half-sunken in the hay, its paws thrust up

around its belly.

"Well, Tara, that brings me to this. How would you like to have him, put him into an aerial act—an act you would have yourself, your very own, an act that will put you into the purple ring?"

Tara became so excited he could hardly breathe. He turned on his side, looked hotly into Niles' eyes, as Niles, with his great savage arms,

pulled him close.

"You tell joke, Niles Klauser," Tara cried, too

exalted to say more.

"No, Tara Akira, I am not telling you a joke," Niles assured, running his huge hands through Tara's raven hair, the other hand up and down his lower spine, to the crack in his behind. "I am

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a lonely man, Tara. My pleasures are few, far apart. Like your Suzuki I live for my work, my cats, the circus. I as an ordinary man, loving ordinary things until I see a handsome, well-built body like yours and I become wilder than my cats. I want you, Tara. I want to give myself to you, my body, my love. I want to master you, as I master my cats, want to tame you with passion—please, please, let me, and I will set up this act for you, train you, put you into the purple ring—please!"

Niles' red lips were just above Tara's, his hot, panting breath on his smooth neck, and his voice, what he was saying, the promises he was making, was stealing their way into Tara's thoughts, his very heart, and he knew it would be impossible to say no, not to this magnificient giant of a man, a man whose supple, muscular body was far more beautiful than the sleek, tawny tigers he owned and trained and mastered.

"I want that more than anything in the world," Tara cried delightedly, conquered, surrendering to something, someone stronger than himself, someone more powerful, more absolute than his love for reason, reserve, morals, his great adoration for Jun. Jun now faded into the background of his mind, his heart; became but a mere vision, vague, remote, lifeless, compared to the strong ferocious man who held him close, who whispered wonderful, cajoling things in his ears, who kissed him with such waywardness, such force, until his whole body grew weak, until he went limber in the whirlpool of his passion, and even though hearing the faint voice of Jun

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in the background of his heart, he whispered to Niles Klauser. "You can have me! You can have me!"

And before Tara knew or realized what was taking place, so fascinated was he by the wild intent of this handsome, golden warrior, he was being stripped of his clothes, and in a moment more Niles stood over him naked, the golden hair on his thighs, his chest, an all-consuming picture in Tara's mind, a vexation in his pounding and frantic heart.

As if in a kind of dumb terror, as if half-awakening from his bed of amor, Tara caught a hasty glimpse of Niles's nakedness as it hovered hugely over him, the thick nest of curling hair in his crotch as his enormous thighs spread wantonly, his horny, lust-hardened prick the forerunner of his passion, his intent suspended there against the background of golden hay, wild and ferocious and free. And in this unleashed tremor, this shuddering of emotion, Tara knew what was expected of him, the role he was to carry out for this man's tempered lusts. But, even as he knew this, sensed it in a kind of vague, half-life, halfdeath dream, huge hands were lifting him, turning him over on his stomach, and an instant more the ponderous weight of Niles Klauser, master of the great beasts, covered his body.

He felt those hands too, hard when they wanted to be, but now like the softest of leather, fumbling at his buttocks, felt his thighs being pressed apart, felt Niles' rigid instrument of pleasure slice his body like a dull knife, goring its way into his flesh, as pain bore on pain, pain relished in every crevice of his body, his nerves,

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his senses, as this powerful male mastered him, drove irresistibly over his young body, taking desperately while loving desperately.

Tara lay surrendering in mystical exaltation, hugging to his bosom the black panther which acceded grudgingly, as it iumed and puffed. Tara did not believe his senses. Niles had conjured him from his safe haven with Jun, had lured him through the tent of the flowers to woo him, to take him, to master him as he so efficiently mastered the beasts of the wilds, calming their screams to purrs, their claws to velvet pads. Suddenly, as if he had discovered a new world, a new thrill he thought impossible of existence, Tara discovered the dark beauty of Niles Klauser, the mystery of him, the ecstasy of him, as his thrashing prick, clumsy in its perfection, drove into him with flaming pleasure and out again taking pleasure with it. Niles was bringing him to bay in these golden clouds of hay, and in the manner of conquering one of his lovable cats, had come to snatch the brand of his passion from the burning: the burning that was Jun Suzuki.

Miles' body over his, was like a pile driver pounding an enormous stake into the dark earth, in the climaxing throes of passion. His body was muscular and strong from pitting his mettle against his cats.

Niles did not mention his frantic desire to be

Tara gave it all he had. Everything to pease Niles Klauser. Submissive, soft, radiant, Tara was the female now, driven into submission by Niles's hard body, and Niles was male. It was as simple as that. That he had turned vainly and

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completely henna, Tara had no doubt. He loved men because he loved the manner in which they sought, mastered, and conquered love. He loved to be taken, as Niles was taking him. The rougher the better, the more savagely he could be penetrated the more fulfilled his deepest emotions and recesses. He gloried in the suffocation of hard masculine arms coiling around him, caresing, yet crushing—revelled in the hairy thighs chafing the creaminess of his inner legs, the turgid rod of pleasure grafted to the enormous male entity which drove it home again and again, as the ripe seeds, swollen to rapture, pounded his crotch as they swung in unison with the savagery of the male's sexual excitement.

It was their world now, his and Niles and the black panther Sarasota, as the three lay in a coil of rapture and male ecstasy. Theirs if but momentarily, the sperm in Niles wonderous, hard body burning its molten way into Tara's, there to lie like a lover's symbol, still burning, as he and Niles thrashed caressingly with arms and thighs, lying still at last.

The black cat purred, as if, too, satisfied of sexual hungers. He licked Tara's face while Niles wet it with kisses, and the three embraced, so preoccupied in the sensuous rapture of bodily touch they were not conscious of anyone, not even the cats in their independent cages.

But when Tara rose up at last, picking straw out of his hair, he noticed a shadow move across the tent entrance, and a shudder went like a silent arrow through his suddenly-leaping heart.

It was Jun Suzuki!

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## Chapter Six

When Tara returned to the orange tent, bewildered, ashamed that Jun had found him with Niles Klauser, he found Jun seated at his little desk, his head resting on his folded arms, sobbing.

Frightened now, Tara went into him and said: "Jun! Jun!"

"How could you?" Jun cried, in broken, muffled sobs. "How could you give yourself to Niles Klauser so easily, like a musume onna (young woman), like a common whore on the Ginza?"

Tara put a trembling hand on Jun's shoulder but he flung it away. He stood up, gazed forlornly at Tara, his heart in his eyes.

"What excuse to shame yourself so! Lose face with circus! Feed the names of Tara Akira and Jun Suzuki onto every gossiping tongue in the crew! Let them eat us alive now! You little fool! You little fool!"

"But—but, Jun!" Tara stammered, irresolute, probing for words with which to sooth over his degradation, but there were none. "How will they know? No one saw us but you."

"Anyone could have seen you! In the light of the day! Like two animals! Like that animal Klauser!"

Tara looked at him with starving pity in his eyes.

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"I couldn't help it, Jun, honest!"

"You couldn't help it! How so?"

Tara feebly tried to explain, the words coming difficult, his voice uncertain, shaky.

"We were in the hay petting Sarasota when ... when all of a sudden it happened!"

"You never thought of me-our love, our life -together?"

Tara felt truly ashamed now.

"Yes, Jun, I thought of you," he answered very slowly, his dark head bowed. "I thought of all you've done for me, but Niles kept coming into my way, like a shadow, honest, Jun. He just threw me in the hay . . . took me!"

Jun's eyes blazed, then narrowed like a coiling

serpent gauging its prey.

"He just threw you in the hay!"

"That's right."

"By the gods of Buddha! How easy!" Jun wrung his hands. "Just throw you in the hay! What a kokei na yagi (funny goat) I've been. I should have done that long ago! Just throw you in the hay!"

"But, Jun," Tara improred, his expression deeply serious, his hands out wide in appeal. "If you had wanted me like that you could have had me ... like Terry Blanche ... like Niles

Klauser."

"What...Terry Blanche! Him too! Buddha

spare me!" "What wrong, Jun Suzuki. I no please you?"

Jun, with hands folded tightly over his heart, his scarlet kimono an outraged splash in the orange tent, looked at Tara with a long, thoughtful look, wondering how anyone could be

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so naive. And wondering too, desperately, with faint heart, how he could make Tara understand.

"Tara, Tara," he murmured, as if in mournful chant, moving nearer and looking down at him with despair in his tearful eyes. "I am more than your tomodati (friend)—much more. I love you like a man loves woman. I want you like man wants woman. Would not a man in Japan kill his wife if she committed adultery?"

"She should be killed, with samurai," Tara

answered without hesitation.

"Then, do you not see how I feel now, watching Niles Klauser penetrate your body, a body I loved as my own, a body I adore, all but worship? Do you not see the rage that burns in my heart knowing he was making sexual love to you, and you allowing it, perhaps loving it?"

"Oh, I did love it, Jun, honest."

Jun screwed up his face, doubled up his fists, let out guttural animal moans, as if he was dying. Then, as if in great effort, he calmed his emotions, tried vainly to compose his nerves.

"You aim at the heart, Tara Akira, and your aim is sudden and deadly. You hurt without knowing you hurt. You destroy without knowing you destroy. What matter of child are you, of what evil, that you can remain so otonasii (gentle) while those who love you wither before your eyes?"

Tara stared after him senseless to Jun's inner pains, now that Niles Klauser had tapped that certain something within him that drove his emotions like dark clouds drive rain, on and on to havoc and storm.

"I no mean to hurt you, Jun. I no think you

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care if Niles gore me in ass or not. You only want me for your pleasures. You never give . . . not like Terry Blanche . . . not like Niles Klauser."

They were silent for a moment, Jun moved ghost-like around the inner walls of the tent, afire in its orange glow; gazing absently at the Japanese furnishings which were essential to his existence, as Tara was essential to his happiness, all a part of the homeland of his native Japan: the wreaths of cherry blossoms made of pink plastic, a tiny jade Shinto shrine, paper lanterns on which were painted legendary heroes of Japan, a miniature of the Sakurado Gate, a painting on silk of a Geisha, a robe from a Sanja festival, a relic from his teen-age world—a Hina doll with all the trappings-getas (sandals), tatami mats, a parasol, bright kimonos, a hibachi (charcoal burner), a fan, a miniature ming tree, all the delicate tracings of Japan. Then, as if in self-discovery, his strength, his wisdom replenished from these relics now holy to him, he looked at Tara, this time without wrath, but with deep love and understanding in his eyes.

"I suppose you are right," he said at last, his voice deep, meaningful. "I have become so engrossed in my work, too obsessed with my desperation to be the greatest aerial star in the peration to be the greatest aerial star in the circus, so heartless that I have given little concern to the pleasures of others. I drive myself so cem to the pleasures of others. I deprive, discipline, starve myself of luxuries. If I am hard on you, Tara Akira, I have been much harder on you, Tara Akira, I have been much harder on myself. I am both my slave and my master, my myself. I am both my slave and my master, my body both their victims. But day in day out, performance upon performance, always driving

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for perfection, applause . . . which becomes your food . . . year upon year never affording one small error, one tiny flaw in your make-up, your person . . . that is why I value you Tara, you relax my body, giving me thrills, making me happy. You gave me all the pleasures I lacked since I became the star attraction, the real spangle prat. In my need of your touch, I suppose I took you for granted. But I was in such need of love, of someone else's warmth, giving me the sex relief I needed, craved. Being a top star can be a sad and awesome thing, Tara Akira ... a very lonely billing."

He stood then before a large painting rendered

on white silk, gazing up at it longingly.

"Do you know why I keep this painting?" he asked of Tara, who came to his side and stood looking up at it, as if he were seeing it for the

first time, and not the hundredth.

"No, I do not," he answered, studying it in detail. It was the picture of a small Japanese urchin of the street, clad in rags, in the slums of the Ginza. The child's eyes were black, enormous, almost as large as his pale, emaciated face, the most haunting, dominating thing about the picture. Once you had looked at it you could not drag your gaze from those terrible, starving eyes, nor could you see anything else in the paintingonly those awe-inspiring eyes, piercing you, pleading, begging, for what?

"Once long ago," Jun began, still gazing forlornly at the picture, "I worked for only 360 yen a day in a cheap laundry off the Ginza. My lunch cost 130 yen a day. I saw this picture in a shop window and wanted it so desperately that I did

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without lunch for over a year in order to pay for it ... 130 yen a day . . . until it was mine."

"But why, why that picture?" asked Tara who failed to see the desolation and privation

the artist had captured.

"Because," Jun said, almost in a whisper, the sounds pouring up from his heart. "Because, Tara Akira, those eyes told me there were some things in the world more terrible than loneliness."

"What?"

"The loss of love . . the loss of a love when you have loved so much." He turned to Tara, his face pensive, no longer enraged, but stained with tears. "When I saw you with Niles Klauser, loving him, being loved by him, something within me slowly died ... not my deep love for you, but the defeat of such a love. I know now what that artist meant, truly meant, when he painted those eyes, that child-like despair. He was painting our kind of love . . . the love of man for man, which can be the most awesome sensualism on earth, the love of the erotomaniac. I did not know it then. But I know it now. Our kind of love can be the most beautiful existence known, you have shown me that, Tara. It can in turn be the most terrible, the most agonizing, the most heartrending, and you have shown me that also, Tara Akira. You have given me the experience of knowing both extremes. But I cannot really hate you for the agony you have caused me, for that agony only drives me to love you, crave you all the more. And I cannot thank you enough for the beauty, the solace you have given me in your devotion to me, your will to please, to thrill; for

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you have answered a call that has haunted me all my life. I always believed that two men could love...two men of the mighty Samurai... locked in a passion that knows no bounds and no equal, making pale all other loves by its ferocious intensity. Today, with Niles Klauser, you taught me one thing, the power, the depth, the endless agony of such a devotion." He paused, gazed at Tara hungrily. Then, with strong, naked arms, he pulled him to him, lay his dark head on his chest. "Tara, oh, Tara, I am possessed with you. I am moderate in all other things, but with you-I am selfish. I cannot, will not share you, your love, your body. Do not expect me to stand idly by while you lie with some other man, return his kisses, thrill his body; for, though Buddha has given me superhuman strength and nerve on the silver wires, I am a weakling in my love of your body, your heart. Please, please, Tara Akira, don't-don't ever touch another man again."

Tara, taking Jun's hand from his hair, kissed it warmly, then, basking in the glory of his nearness, lay his face in the hollow of his neck, closing his eyes, tears flowing in the knowledge

that he had hurt Jun so.

"Oh, Jun, forgive me! Forgive me!" he cried, as tears of regret flooded his face, "I promise, if you care for me, if you care so much, I will never go to anyone else, never again. Not Terry Blanche ... not Niles Klauser, no one. I live only for you. Live to make you happy. To thrill your body when you want to be thrilled."

"Thank Buddha!" Jun said fervently. Their love for each other had been magnified by rage

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and wrath, so ferocious an emotion that only destruction could come from the wild, grandiose dimensions of it. To be torn free by love, to be rejoined by love, making up for the loss, the heartache, the agony...this was a mind-shaking experience.

"I did it because Niles Klauser promised to give me his panther," Tara commented casually.

Jun lifted Tara's face to his, their eyes melting into one another's.

"He wanted to give you his panther?"

"Yes, Jun. He wants to train me in an aerial act."

Jun frowned.

"What kind of aerial act?"

Tara explained.

"Niles saw it once long ago. An act with a panther. Oh, he didn't explain all the details. But it's daring, Jun. And he said I would make

the purple ring. Do you think I will?"

"I don't know," said Jun, in deep thought. He stared through the flap in the tent to the big tent in the distance. He eyed the three rings, one red, one blue, one purple. An odd sensation crept through him and a shadow crossed his face. He looked down at Tara who was still gazing up at his face. "Tara," he whispered, in deep earnest. "If you did make the purple ring...succeeded me...would it change things between us? Would you still care, still love me, make love to me, relax me?"

"Why—of course, Jun" Tara answered, looking at him fondly. "Nothing can ever come between us, Jun. Terry Blanche, Niles Klauser, purple ring, nothing...nothing worth your

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love."

"I hope so, Tara Akira," Jun murmured and, once again, with a melancholy glaze in his eyes, he looked toward the center ring. This time, if only in a vision he could erase at will, he saw Tara high up in the starlit rigging, heard faintly the applause, the distant roll of drums, the barbarous music. Then, once more, he glanced at the picture on the wall.

"Hold me, Tara," he cried then, as if he was seeing a ghost. "Please . . . please don't ever let me go."

"I never let you go, Jun" Tara said, basking in this majestic warmth, this living and breathing god. "You just wait and see. When I make purple ring, I love you just the same. I never quit loving you, honest."

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## Chapter Seven

Under Niles Klauser's strict instructions, Tara began his vigorous, nerve-chilling rehearsals with the black panther, Sarasota. Niles was a great, tireless trainer, patient to attain obedience, demanding only with guile, and one under his rigorous and punctilious tutelage learned, quickly and thoroughly.

No ancient fanatic of the Samurai, no pupil of Karate, no ambitious disciple of Judo, and never a performer anywhere in the world, gave himself up to his ambition, his one goal, as did Tara to learn the aerial act Niles Klauser planned for him. He worked at it day and night, any half hour or less that he could utilize away from his duties to Jun Suzuki, and dreamed about it at night.

Alert, attentive, obeying every command given by Niles—with a determination equal only to his vigor, his strength, his flexibility and dexterity— He halved the time it would have taken another performer, even one with aerial experience, to learn the highly skilled and nerve-wracking act that was, with certainty, destined to place him in

the purple ring.

He and Niles had found the essential trappings in the storage tent, had them refurbished, re-silvered, until they were again like new. And Sarasota, a pert and obedient animal, caught on as quickly as did Tara, and together they made a

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splendid team. Both of them were in radiant, robust health, both nerveless, both governed by their own rare potential, both beautiful in the ring.

The act itself was superb, the ultimate in skill, balance, and daring, unlike any circus act presented anywhere else in the world, an act in which the undivided attention of man and animal could never be diverted, not for a single instant, without injury or death claiming them both.

Tara, with a short knife thrust between his teeth, was to balance from its pointed edge the point of a long sword. On the hilt of the sword would be balanced a tray, six goblets, a flagon of wine, and crowning this a torch. Keeping these articles on the vertical level with his own body, he would climb a silver ladder, also vertical, to a platform connected to the top-most rung. As he climbed, Sarasota, balanced on a spiraled rod, would go round and round Tara till both reached the top. Then, as Tara allowed his body to lie prone, balancing the weight of his body on the highest rung of the ladder, Sarasota would leave his perch and stand on top of Tara's body, his gleaming teeth but an inch from Tara's throat.

When they had completed the act for the first time, every member of the circus watched spell-bound, shaking their heads and muttering that they would never do it. But do it they did, and magnificently, without a single flaw, without restraint, without hesitation or awkwardness.

"It will be the greatest, the most death-defying act in the world," Niles Klauser related proudly to Jun Suzuki as they stood near the

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outer ring and watched with undisguised admiration.

Jun said nothing, his slitted eyes beaded, tiny bitter lights behind long curling lashes. Not only was he losing Tara as a lover, but a face as well. Regret and rage and frustrated possessiveness burned in his heart, but melted as wax when Tara flung the knife and sword at a wooden target, sticking their points deep into the hard wood, to show the audience they were indeed real blades, then, with a broad smile on his face, rushed to Jun's side.

"Was I great? Huh? How did I do?"

"Yes," Jun answered politely, smothering his inward turmoil, You were great, Tara, and I—the Circus of the Flowers is proud of you. Niles Klauser, like the Americans say, has made a silk purse out of a sow's ear!"

They all laughed at that, as Jun nudged

Tara's ear with a finger, playfully.

"I be in purple ring, no?" Tara cried, filled to the brim and overflowing with pride and exaltation.

"You're not ready yet," Niles Klauser said, and with studied firmness. "You have a lot of practicing yet to do. You must do it over and over again and again hundreds of times, before you can do it with ease in front of an audience."

"The audience makes the difference," Jun advised solemnly as he and Niles formed a truce ... an armistice... in their excitement and interest over Tara's great talent and courage. "You must rehearse so often, with such regularity, that you will do it in your sleep. And even though you rehearse without an audience, when

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the big tent is empty, the long rows of seats cold and lonely, your mind must rehearse, and your heart must rehearse as if each time you perform it is a first night, the seats packed, the audience spellbound. Then, when you are truly ready, your body will suddenly become weightless, your mind will grasp with a clarity you have never experienced before in your life, and you will remember all you've been taught, all you've learned, and you will be sure then, more sure of your act than anything you have ever done." He paused, gave Tara a knowing smile. "Then, Tara Akira, when you know these things, then you will know that you are truly ready for a real audience . . . but not before."

"But when can I perform?" Tara cried, impatient, certain in his ability to succeed unafraid before a thronging, noisy audience. "I think I'm ready now . . . honest!"

"But you must design a costume and stitch it first," Jun said, his voice trailing off, dying in his throat. "A costume in keeping with your act. And that takes time . . . time and much consideration."

"But I can use one of yours," Tara said rashly, too eagerly. A deep frown marked his face.

"Never!" Jun declared, shaking a finger at Tara sternly. "It is bad luck to use another performer's costume for a new act!'

"But, Jun . . . !"

"Jun Suzuki is right," said Niles, turning Tara by the shoulders to face him squarely. "This is going to be a great act. And when you have finished your rehearsals, ironed out all the kinks, delivering the grace I know you can de-

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liver, you will outdo the great performer himself, the man who invented this act. So for such a great act you must make certain your regalia is in keeping with the grand style . . . a shimmering body, almost naked, a long flowing cape, all flashing with jewels and spangles, everything that will enhance your handsomeness, your fine body."

Jun gave Niles a petrified stare.

"There is only one person," Niles went on, as enthralled over the act as Tara, "in New Orleans who could do you justice in designing your costume . . . that fellow called Japanelle . . . at the Golden Lantern." He turned thoughtless eyes to Jun. "You know who I am talking about, don't you?"

"I know the male bitch!" Jun spat, his lips twisted in a deplorable frown. "A man dressed

like a woman, performing like a woman!"

"This is of no matter," Niles assured. "His . . . er...her costumes are the most extravagant I've ever seen, and she . . . he . . . makes them himself . . . so I've been told"

"Good! It's settled then," Tara cried gleefully, all but leaping up and down. "How soon?

How soon?"

Niles looked at Jun, and Jun looked at Niles.

Neither spoke.

Niles Klauser assumed the responsibility, since it was he who had trained Tara, to commission the female impersonator to design and make Tara's aerial costume.

The day Japanelle came to the orange tent to take measurements of Tara's body, to study his coloring, to gauge his personality so as to design

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his regalia in keeping with his individualty, Jun fumed in silent, smouldering rage. He never took his blazing eyes off Japanelle's hands as they touched Tara's body in the most unnecessary places, and he writhed at the way the two got on together. Japanelle was all praise, all flattery, and Tara, never one to ignore any remark made about his person, his good looks, his physique, completely succumbed. Jun, too, watched the way their glittering eyes caught and held each time they looked at one another, witnessed their side-long glances, their coquetry, and he drew a complete halt to the fitting when Japanelle suggested that Tara remove his fig-leaf shorts so that he could measure his groin for the jeweled crotch-sling.

"That is time consuming and completely unneccessary," Jun said coldly, eyeing Japanelle maliciously. "You can make it out of material that stretches... the same as mine."

"But, kakari no hito," cried Japanelle, keeping his masculine voice presently, since he had arrived in male attire. "I want your star to look as if completely undraped. High up on the wires who will know?"

"I will know!" Jun flung back, as their eyes flashed tiny sparks of light. Tara and Niles looked at one another, but kept their silence. "Besides, it matters not what you want. It is what Tara wants that counts!"

"Okay with me if I work naked!" Tara said, with nonchalance. It was both ill-timed and inappropriate.

Jun swelled up in his chest, drawing a deep breath.

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"You would shame us all!"

"He would do nothing of the sort," Niles put in, impatient with the entire procedure. "Tara is only aware of his body, his perfect physique, and he wants to show it at best advantage...don't you, Tara?"

Tara nodded, in elation over the big fuss con-

cerning his looks.

"Then let him fly naked!" Jun screamed his anger, acting for the first time since Tara had met him, very hitorimusume, (female). "Let his prick hang down like a big tyoozume (sausage). Let world," and he flung up his hands dramatically. "Let whole world see his bare-ass!" He stormed out of the tent, past the panther, Sarasota, who, tied to one of the tent poles, let out a threatening growl. Jun jumped out of its way, his flamboyant cape furling up like wind tossed sails. "Why don't you measure him for costume?" he flung at Japanelle who, innocent of the entire affair, stiffened. "Panther maybe have prick as big as Tara's, no! Then you can play with his . . . like you want to play with Tara's."

"What's the matter with him?" Niles asked, scratching his blonde curly hair, "Off his rocker,

or something?"

"I don't know," Tara answered very slowly, almost in a solemn whisper, as his sad eyes trailed after Jun who made his way briskly through the big tent and out onto the parade lot. But Tara did know. He knew that Jun was jealous of him, and the knowledge of this went to his heart. But with that knowledge was a new interest which stirred in his emotions for Japanelle, the impersonator.

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Reflections of his uncle Tara Rasha seemed to be in the fantastic personage of this fiery creature, and this alone lured him to him, to like him, to be fascinated by his witty remarks, his strange wild beauty, his deception . . . which alone is mystery within itself. He had loved Tara Rasha dearly, in both guises, that of male and that of female, and there was no condemnation in his heart for this beguiling boy-girl who brought to the surface the strange marvels super-imposed upon Tara's physical make-up. He was totally himself in the presence of Japanelle, and he felt at ease, for he understood him, and he considered that Jun did not. He loved Jun, loved him more than he had ever loved anyone in his life, perhaps even more than he loved his uncle; and to that love there was added an overflow of admiration and respect. But he neither understood him, nor did he feel at home in his presence. Jun kept himself aloof, even during intimate moments with sex, and he gave nothing but his body, and that in a demanding attitude, something of a superior aura Tara could not cope with at times, nor could he fulfill to the ultimate, not as he could have done so gladly if Jun had been warmer, closer. But because he admired Jun so, his great powerful physique, his nerveless talent, he longed to satisfy him, make him happy, even if it meant bending to him like a servant, a slave.

But with Japanelle he was an equa. Too, Japanelle was small, petit, as beautiful as a painted Japanese girl of the Cherry Dance, as delightful as a paper kite in the April wind, as mysterious as the geisha. In fact, even when

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Japanelle wore male attire, Tara thought him more female than male, and this natural heritage from early childhood, to like and want girls, instilled in him the desire for Japanelle; that want of the ageless eons, that expression indistinguishable, even to Tara, the desire for candor and playfulness with sudden hardness, fluttering and unespected, so unlike the staid Jun Suzaki: a marble statue in his perfection . . . mingling ostentation and reserve, being naive and gauche, but always sincere . . . the need for someone close to his own age, someone flexible who would, as did the beautiful, exotic Japanelle, tacitly codify an existing tablet of desires into welldefined aspiration, and permit the age-sympathy to assert itself.

In seeing and being with Japanelle, though so far so briefly, Tara felt the demand for the first time for a total life, a quest for a life for himself which is in every human entity's consciousness when he tears himself from the nest of childhood and the chains of family; only to see before him the new chains and proscriptions arising from his altered status in the social order. The desire to become, for once, an entity outside the anonymity of society; this withdrawal urge, coupled with a need to become integrated with those truly his peers and, finally, rejection of a condition imposed by others, fired smoldering rebellion deep in Tara.

This was what Tara saw and felt, though unknowingly, when in the presence of the manwoman Japanelle. A physical image of his counter-part. He the male—Japanelle the female, though both were males. He did not feel male, though both were males.

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this with Jun, nor with Terry Blanche nor with Niles Klauser. In his role with them he was, willy-nilly, the female. With Japanelle, Tara became what he really was . . . male, absolute male.

So it was natural that he liked this young, slim, graceful Oriental who, so much a woman, so much more a female than male, and so much the essence of the male-female who had reared him, educated him, given him a home and parental love . . . love of both a mother and father.

Had Tara met Japanelle before his sexual encounters with other men . . . the filthy sex-corrupts in the quarter, Terry, Niles ... he would have, no doubt, looked at Japanelle as a sister image, sexless, non-desirable. But the inner tap of his desires had been breached by men; he had tasted; he had relished that taste; he had come to know the power, the ferocity, the mystic side of the male; and the hungers rising from this fortuitous experience had sharpened his appetite for more. Now, but only in secret, he longed for sex with Japanelle.

So while he awaited his costume, he continued work upon his act; practiced diligently; took Niles Klauser's every instruction, and busied himself with the perfection of posture and the enhancement of the grace of body he realized would be expected of him once Jun and Niles allowed him the elevation to the rank of performer of the purple ring.

In his wild, almost treacherous ambition to become the star attraction in the Circus of Flowers, Tara, at times almost forgot the reason he had stolen from the transport ship the Yoshinosau Maru and come to America. He had

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met so many wonderful peop.e, he had gained so much, was to a degree so happy, so excited, at times so thrilled, that he let slip his mind that he had come in search of his father.

However, he did find time to write to his uncle Tara Rasha regularly and, luckily, one day received a long letter from his uncle informing him that he had learned by writing an inquiry to Marine Headquarters in Washington that Erik Shannon, Tara's father, was senior non-com in charge of the north and south gates of the Corpus Christi Naval Base. So Tara immediately wrote his father a letter, begging him to visit him. He received a reply by return mail.

"Dear Tara, (it read:) It is indeed a pleasure and a surprise to hear from my lost and only son. Wish Hanna were alive this moment, to share such rewarding happiness with me. As soon as I can make arrangements for a thirty-day leave, I will come to visit you at your place of employment in New Orleans.

Until that long awaited time ...

Love-Your father, Erik Shannon."

In eation, so excited he could hardly speak, Tara made his rounds through the circus living quarters showing everyone the letter: Harry the clown, who wept silently; Niles, who bestowed upon him a beaming smile, to Spider the four-legged man, to Thelma the fat girl, to Tinker the midget, to the cooks, the riggermen, the sledge crews, the carpenters, the painters, the animal caretakers—even to the Governor.

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"I—we will lose you now," Jun said to him, as they sat on the soft bed in the orange tent pondering over the message. "You will leave me, Tara. You will leave the circus, and all we have taught you.. leave all who love you."

"Never," Tara answered. "Father Erik only pay visit, not take me away from circus. I am

grown man, make my own decision."

"I hope so," Jun said, reaching out hungrily and pulling Tara close to him. "I don't know what. I would do if I lost you; if something happened to you so that I could not see you, be with you every day. I think I would go mad. I don't think I would want to live."

"You never lose me, Jun, never!" Tara assured. "Honest!"

From that day on, the eyes of Jun looked on Tara with a deeper hunger, almost a haunted affection, following him wherever he went with his absent but desperate gaze, as if Tara might vanish before his very eyes and he would never see him again.

And each night under the warm glow of the little Japanese lanterns in the orange tent, illuminating their naked bodies as if they were lit from within, as they lay close together on the scarlet silk bed, Jun's aloofness softened a little more. It was he, now, who caressed Tara's body—not Tara his—taking that unexpected twist of nature which had been secretly planned for him, admiring Tara's willing, outstretched form as though each night would be the last. And it was Jun's tongue that began to seek out the little nourishing pleasures, kissing each portion of Tara, each rounded muscle, his nipples lovingly,

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sliding down hungrily to his groin where he, unbidden, cupped his lips over Tara's surrendering maleness, having loved, and now at long last being loved in return.

This extra gift of happiness—this incursion of balm into Tara's life, filled him with the golden nectar of ecstasy, and he wished at times (especially when he was fatigued, weary from practicing all day on the aerial act he would later perform in the purple ring) that the night would never end, that Jun would go on and on loving him forever.

But triggered now to the male body, the ecstasy of the male attraction lusting in his young heart for others who would turn on his charm, sex for the thrilling debauchery of sex, he took to maming during his few spare moments, called by a voice he could not ignore, lured by a power he could not, would not resist. Whatever it was that beckoned, whatever it was that turned his ears red, boiled his blood, he had to answer, had to seek out and find.

The curiosity of his age demanded it. His animal instincts demanded it. His super-human, abnormal sexual drive demanded it. The whole of his body demanded it, the rhythms, the pulsations, the wild calls, the unleashed depravity, the uninhibited vacillation of male sex hungers and the need for male fraternization. Basically he was illiberal, and the expression of illiberalism was corruption.

The taste of male roamed like a wild thing in his blood, erupting to molten ballast in his system, and when this hunger for such fare awakened within him, he took to prowling, seeking

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out his prey among the crew within the borders of the circus.

He found fulfillment in the mighty form of Babylon, the giant.

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## Chapter Eight

Babylon was eight and a half feet tall and weighed almost four hundred pounds. There was not an ounce of fat on his body, all hard, sinewy muscles, turgid and beautifully swollen by years of weight lifting. His thighs were as large as an elephant's, shoes had to be especially made for him, and his leather wrist bands would have slipped over a camel's nose with ease. A silver dollar could be easily threaded through his finger ring, and he could consume half a ham, a chicken, two pies and a gallon of milk a meal.

Babylon had but recently joined the Circus of the Flowers, an import from the traveling circus of Europe, from somewhere in the Mongolian regions of China; so valuable an asset was he that the Governor had paid twenty thousand to

get him.

Babylon was the main feature of the freak side-show, drawing literally hundreds to get a glimpse of his gargantuan frame posed so majestically on the elevated stage which could be viewed from all four sides; seated in an enormous chair made especially for him from giant elephant tusks, dressed like "Mr. Clean" a wide belt as enormous as a horse's belly-band, green trunks, black boots that turned down with wide cuffs, pirate-fashion, leather wrist bands, his head shaven, tremendous golden earrings in his pierced ears.

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Tara almost went out of his Nipponese mind the first time he got a glimpse Babylon seated upon his special stage, his huge naked thighs spread invitingly, his elbows resting on one knee, like Rodin's "The Thinker." The bulge in his crotch protruded more amply than the Percheron stallion's, and Tara could not drag his gaze from that portion of his all-but-naked body. All he could say to himself was "what a man!" each time he looked at him, bemused by his vast chest, the mat of black hair, the briars spreading from his nipples to his belt, and along the hard contours of his fascinating thighs.

Seeing him, Tara's sexual desire galvanized to the ultimate extreme, he trembled so that he could hardly walk, forgetful of everything and of everyone, even Jun. When he thought of him, he almost went mad with the hungry cravings to see Babylon naked. It haunted him both day and night. He made up fantasies about lying with him in his half-awakened dreams, slumber that wasn't slumber, merely pensive lulls of desire playing wildly through his mind, and he plotted ways, invented situations to, somehow, run into Babylon in the course of his dressing, bathing, or in the toilets.

He watched Babylon's daily schedule like a private eye, knew when he ate, the time of his performances, and actually followed him, ravenously, nerveless but nervous, hoping he would utilize the toilets so that he could get a glimpse of his prick as he reeled it out. Tara bathed two or three times a day in hope he would run into the giant unhusked, his enormous prick and nuts laid bare upon which he could feast his hungry,

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sex-starved eyes. Tara had gloried in watching the stallions when erect, actually fondling their pink pricks when no one was looking; got nervous all over when the huge grey pachyderms went into heat, loved to just sit and hold Jun's because it was of such an abnormal size, to lay his lips so close to Niles Klauser's he could feel its turgit throb, but Babylon...how large his must be if it was in normal proportion to his height and weight!

If only he could find the opportunity to catch him undraped! If only, through some stroke of sheer good luck, he could come upon him casually, unexpectedly, in the row of tin partitioned showers constructed for the entire crew, or the long lane of wooden commodes exposing bare

asses like a galaxy of shining moons.

He had, at some time or another, seen practically every man's prick in the circus, from top performer to the dish washer's, the midget Tinker's (no larger than his little finger), Spider's, who had to practically strip naked when he used the toilets because of his four legs, the wild man of Borneo, who wasn't wild at all, his long, thin member twisted grotesquely, Harry the clown's, streaked with sickly blue veins, Cuffy the albino's, snow white, freckled, the Wolf Boy's from India, completely covered with hair, and Kuwanii's the African bushman, a dangling black snake.

If only he could see, maybe touch Babylon's!

One evening, directly after supper, when the crew members were filing out of the cooktent, a fire broke out in the rear of the kitchen, caused when one of the ovens, supported by concrete

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building bricks were accidently kicked loose. One of the messboys, a negro hardly out of his teens.

became pinned beneath.

Like lightning, Babylon rushed from the dining table and, with a display of superhuman strength, lifted the oven and set it to one side, while several of the clowns pulled the boy out and laid him on a stretcher.

Though Babylon had grabbed up an oil-cloth from one of the dining tables to protect his hands from the hot oven, he was nevertheless burned, the wiry hair on his forearms singed, the muscles along his biceps blistered a vivid red.

Babylon was given first aid by one of the interns employed by the circus, and he went to his tent to lie down. Tara followed.

Playing the good Samaritan in order to be alone with the giant, Tara quickly, obediently fluffed up his enormous pillow, made from zebra hide, lay back the crimson sheets. Though Babylon was a mute, he understood, or thought he understood Tara's good naturedness. He allowed himself to be pampered. When he had stretched out on his ten-foot-long bed (his weight causing the custom-made mattress to sink almost to the sawdust floor), Tara pulled the tent flaps and tied them in place so that they would not be disturbed.

Then, atremble, his every nerve pulsating like beating drums at the sight of this magnificent giant sprawled attractively, he wet a towel and placed it on his brow. Babylon gave him a faint grin, in indication that he approved, and Tara pulled up a chair close as if to watch and take mental note of his convalescence.

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Babylon closed his eyes and Tara allowed his gaze to wander down the length of his statuesque body. The gigantic man was like Atlas of Greek mythology, like Samson in the Bible, or Goliath who was slain by David, a creature of a superhuman race.

His eyes rested on his crotch, where the giant's bathing type trunks were fit snugly. Tara longed with lustful determination to unbuckle his belt, slip down his trunks and once and for all get a glimpse of that for which he had yearned, dreamed. But he dared not. Babylon would crush him like a walnut.

Then, he thought of an idea. He would un-

dress him, as if for bed!

Thinking he had automatically solved his little problem, he got up from his chair, began to tug at Babylon's boots. The giant opened his eyes

drowsily and gave him a surprised look.

Tara made a few signals with his hands, making known his "good" intentions. Babylon nodded his head, as drops of sweat beaded Tara's brow. He was on his way to ecstacy now, employing every ounce of his reserve until he reached and exposed Babylon's crotch. And what a pleasure that would be for him, a thing so perfumed with rapture he wanted to rush at it, to grasp up these precious moments in one second, but on keener thought, he took his time, making his task into a work of art, prolonging every moment until that great one, exposing the repository—the treasure trove in that hollow of Babylon's loins.

He had difficulty in getting off his tight pirate's boots, but after a half-hour's working them

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back and forth they slipped off, falling limply to the sawdust, for they were so heavy he could not lift them. Then, with loving care he pulled down his woolen socks, drank his fill of his huge toes, so neatly trimmed, the hair around his ankle, which, as the touch of his hands, bristled like the hair on a wolf.

Then, feeling like one of the elves in Gulliver's Travels, he pulled apart Babylon's giant legs so that he could climb up between them, and when he had done this, shaking all over, he sat on his legs, Japanese fashion, and began to unbuckle his huge, leather belt. Babylon sunk in his stomach muscles so that he could remove it easier, and Tara caught a sickening glimpse of his navel, a long horizontal slip as large as his own lips, and where the rich, crisp pubic hair began.

His hands shaking so that he could hardly manipulate them, he caught hold of Babylon's trunks, pulled, as Babylon willingly lifted his torso a foot from the bed. The trunks came down, as Babylon's giant prick jumped at him. It was the size of a fireman's hose, its head like that of a gargantuan cobra. His nuts were the size of coconuts, as they hung in their skin bag a foot from his crotch. The area around lay in a field of black hair which was as long as the hair on Tara's head, black, intense black and like strands of coiled wire.

With his own loins shuddering, with every nerve loose, he gazed at the beautiful area there with the just that made his lips drip. Unconsciously, he lay his hand on Babylon's hard flat thigh, eased it up to the patch of hair, pushed his fingers in, felt their coarseness, loving the fiber

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or each strand which curled over his hands, hands that looked as small as a child's compared to the body beside him. He gave a questioning glance up Babylon's body to his eyes, which were studying him intently, their pupils glittering with the rank curiosity of his muteness, asking so much with their hot light, telling so much!

Then, as the gesture alone tore through Tara's mind maddeningly, Babylon lifted his thighs up, in the position of cruxifiction and then eased his body downward, so that Tara was pinned in the dark being paradise.

dark hairy paradise.

His courage was failing him now, going weaker and weaker, slipping from his reserve like sand through an hour-glass, as he shook, as his body convulsed, as his lust drove him on to do the things he most wanted to do, to take Babylon's colossal prick in his hand. Longingly, he pushed his right hand through the thicket of black hair, hair like wool now, let his fingers encircle his prick where it joined the mammoth groin, touching the veins which, almost the size of a pencil, ran wild up his prick like streams on a map.

He shot Babylon a quick glance. His huge black eyes, returning his gaze were like hot branding irons. It was the go ahead sign. Tara had seen that same hot glare in Jun's eyes when he wanted sex, in Terry's, many times in Niles'. It was the universal look, a gaze that said more

with a glance that could fill a book.

With his heart pounding within him, Tara ran his fingers up and down the tall pole of warm flesh, cupped his fists around its great throbbing head, pulled back the lips of the opening and thrust in his tongue. It was that large, and he

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ran his tongue up into the end until his lips curled over the top. He trembled in awe, as the great dark thighs moved restlessly, wantonly.

Swiftly, like a flash of light, came to his mind the encounter he had had one day with Tinker the midget. He had sat on a keg in the sun, and Tinker had stood between his legs, his tiny dolllike mouth just going over the tip end of the head of his dick, his small delicate fingers holding his dick with both hands like a pet monkey holds a banana. Tears had run down Tinker's face when he filled him with come, as tears were running down his face now, dripping off the end of his chin.

He was swallowed up in the dark, hairy sex of this colossal male, sunk in the glory of male with male as deeply, as profoundly as he would ever get. And between those mountainous thighs, wooded with back hair, their molten warmth radiating hotly, he became drenched in sweat, as he worked himself into a sexual frenzy, as he brought contented moans from Babylon's lips, invading his inner groin with rapture, causing him to twitch his enormous buttocks, thrash about with his thighs, to fondle his own nuts with his huge, heavily ringed hand.

Outside, in the big tent, they were playing, "Enter the Gladiators," and as Tara lay in the dark cave of flesh, drinking the nectar of this wonderful giant, he could hear the sounds faintly, and realized that Jun was going into his high-aerial act, that he was up there in those star-studded aeries, his dark, lava-colored body moving as graceful as a diver below the tides. While he, while he was drinking the nectar of a

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giant, his groping hands, like Tinker's and like a monkey's with a banana, fondling the hairy staff of warm meat.

Momentarily, so wrapped, so enveloped he was with this lordly male, he dared not let himself think of Jun. Later yes. Later he would feel shame and remorse, especially when he lay with Jun, hearing him speak of love and trust and loyalty ... but now, this marvelous moment, he basked, reveled in the molten ballast flowing down his throat, and into the warm mansion of his belly. All guilt was his. All atoning, all the prayers he must write down on strips of bark to say to Buddha, all shame but, even if death resulted from this andromania with Babylon, he could not have turned his head away from the fountain of gutting sperm, or allowed his mind, his whole being to stray for one moment from the doing.

And when Babylon ay spent at last, his flesh hose like a huge limp eel in its thicket of hair, Tara still gripped it lovingly with one hand, while with the other, frantically, with overwrought nerves, with gusts of wild ecstasy, he

jacked himself off ...

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## Chapter Nine

The night of Tara's circus debut was a riotous success. He and Sarasota performed to a packed audience, their act being advertised far ahead of time in the local papers, on T. v., and huge, colorful billboards strung up all over New Orleans. They performed perfectly, without flaw, without clumsiness, as true veteran Spangle Prats.

In the brilliantly-lit costume Japanelle had designed and made for him, Tara made a striking picture coming into the ring to the entry music of "Quo Vadis"; resplendent, majestic, handsome, his long flowing cape of deep purple, with emerald markings like the patterns on the wings of a butterfly, a high collar sprinkled with orange lights, his sequined crotch-sling barely covering his nakedness.

He captivated the thronged audience. Every seat was filled, the aisles were jammed, and one could have heard a pin drop when he lay prone on the quivering ladder, with Sarasota standing on his torso, still holding the knife in his mouth, balancing the sword, the tray with the flagons and goblets, the fiery torch burning nervously, a nervewracking spine-chilling performance.

When it was over, moving triumphantly through the cheering, howling, whistling mob, returning twice to the purple ring to bow, to smile, then back again through the moving sea of

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human flesh, when he gained the canvas flap which divided the big tent from the one housing the props, he rushed to the orange tent and to Jun's side.

I'm a star!" he shouted excitedly, as Jun embraced him, and for tense, wonderous moment they stood molded as one, their eyes streaming

tears of happiness.

"You have succeeded me," Jun said, without bitterness, without rage. He merely stated a fact. "I'm glad it was you, and not anyone else. If I have to be beaten, I had rather you do it. For I love you, Tara Akira, as you well know, and I only want your happiness."

Tara looked up at him with shining, ensilvered

eyes.

"I am happy," he muttered, child-like. "I am the happiest boy in the whole world. But you're still a star too, Jun. In my eyes you are the

greatest!"

"Thanks," Jun replied, kissing Tara fondly.
"Now we can celebrate, just the two of us. I've planned a little party for us, just for you and

me, see!"

He whirled around, fancifully and pointed to the table decorated with an enormous urn of red roses, shining silverware, rice bowls, chop sticks, bottles of sake, cookies sprinkled with sugar, salads of herbs and vegetables thick with sauce. There were additions, too, to the orange tent: urns of cherry blossom, straw mats on the sawdust floors on which where painted Mt. Fuji, papier-mache figures of gay festivity, the musical tsuzumi, beautiful brocade kimonos for both to wear, a lovely bonsai plant in full bloom, and on

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a little burner a feast for the gods, hot matsuzaka beef, sukiyaki, and Tara's favorite: fried chicken southern style.

Tara glanced round, his face suddenly white.

"But Jun," he cried, crestfallen. "You know Japanelle have big party at the Golden Lantern especially for me, and for Niles. And you too!

Why you fix party here?"

"For us," Jun answered solemnly, coming to him and touching his face warmly. "Here . . . Tara Akira . . . here in this beautiful tent where we first made love, surrounded by all the things we both love that are Japanese, bringing Japan back to us for a little while. Oh, Tara, do you not just feel the air of the Pacific on your face tonight as you gaze at all these lovely things . . . things just to cover us and adore from the old Japan? Don't you feel you are back in Nara around the temple, or Tokyo at the shrine, on the Ginza?"

"But-but we in America now!"

"I know," Jun insisted, kissing him on the brow. "But tonight. This one night, Tara, this one lovely, triumphant night, the night of your stardom, couldn't you share it with mecouldn't you?"

"I come back after party—promise," Tara said, anxious to be in on the celebration in his honor. "We have party then, we love, I suck you,

you suck me. . . party all night."

"No," Jun stammered, lifting his hand as if to ward him off. "Tonight, Tara, must be ours alone. We both have worked hard for this moment. It is ours, because we deserve it. We live in America, this is true, but our hearts belong in

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old Japan, with the old, honored traditions. Sobecause we love each other, because we have so much to share together, we must feast tonight Japanese style. We must put on brocade kimono of the classic drama, wear geta on our feet, walk on mats, must have ritual of tea beside the little fiery hibachi, must strum the tsuzumi and sing old Japanese songs, must play game of poem cards, must strip, must love." He paused, looked tiredly at Tara whose face was set in a deep frown. "This is our hour. Long time, hard work, sacrifice, jealousy, unhappiness lead to this hour . . . our hour of success, your success, Tara, whom I hold with deepest netu (fever). Other times we live as the American lives. Tonight, for the sake of greater Japan to which we must pay honor, we live like Japanese."

"Oh, Jun!" Tara said, irritated. "We can live Japanese every night for as long as we live. But tonight, Japanelle throw big party for me ... for me!" He put his hand to his chest. "Everybody be there. We live Japan at the Golden Lantern!

Please!"

Jun's eyes narrowed. Picking up a fan from a low console he began to move it back and forth nervously.

"You deny me, Tara Akira?" After all I have

done for you?"

"No deny you, Jun," Tara cried, pleading. "I do anything to make you happy . . honest! You know that. But tonight I go to Japanelle's."

He swept the beautiful cape up around his nakedness, as if, through some strange inversion, he wanted to shield both his body and his sex from Jun's pleading gaze.

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"That male whore!" Jun then flung at him, the fan twitching. "You go to that over me? You prefer him to me?"

"Oh, Jun, you wrong! You wrong!" Tara pleaded, his eyes hot, bright. "I love you, only you, always. You never step out on me. You work just for me. You honorable, faithful. I no lay with this Japanelle—honest. Only go to big party she toss for me."

Jun gazed at him then with hard, cold eyes.

"Then-you do intend to go anyway?"

Tara swallowed hard.

"Yes . . . I go."

"And leave our tent of triumph and tears, the

place of our love spawning?"

"Yes," Tara repeated, eyeing Jun steadily. He wasn't quite sure how to take him, for he had always depended on Jun to do the right thing, which he always did, without question.

Japan mean no more to you than that ... a

male neko (cat)?"

Tara stammered, almost in tears. He did not want to hurt Jun, ever, but the celebration, the crowds, the adoration he would receive, after these long tiresome weeks of training—to this he could not say no.

"Japan mean everything to me, Jun, like you do. I no want to make you angry, honest! To-morrow we live Japanese. Tomorrow you and me, we lay in bed all day. I suck you till you hollow no . . . no?"

Jun's breath came in troubled sighs. He lifted his chin haughtily, closed the fan, tapping the end of it on the back of his hand.

"If you go to that—that Japanelle's ... there

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will be no tomorrow. You and I will be finished as lovers. I will go to someone else . . . anyone . . . the first that comes to my tent . . . if you go, Tara Akira, if you go tonight."

Tara looked at him, as anger mounted within his small body. He loved Jun but Jun did not

own him, could never possess him.

"Are you threatening me?" he asked, looking disdainful.

"Not threatening . . . telling you," Jun anwered, and there was rage and malice in the tone of his voice.

"I go then!" Tara cried, swinging the cape up over his broad shoulders, the hem of it fanning out around him. "I go, see if you carry out threat!"

He all but ran from the tent, with Jun calling hysterically after him:

"You go to that party naked? Shame circus!

Shame Japan! Shame our love!"

His voice grew fainter and fainter as Tara hurried through the big tent, now being emptied of people past the crew members picking up the litter, the scattered debris, the soiled and tattered remains of the moving army of spectators.

Tara went in the car with Niles. They stopped at a bar on Marigny while, distraught, Tara told him everything about him and Jun Suzuki.

"No one can own another person," Niles remarked, his kind, thoughtful eyes on Tara. "Give the person you love complete freedom is my motto, and you'll win them everytime. They will always come to you eventually, but squeeze them, like mercury in your fingers, they will slip through." He glanced around the cavern of a bar,

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saw a huddle of heads craned in their direction. "Which reminds me, he added, looking at Tara's near nakedness. "We had better get out of here. You in that costume, people gonna thing you're

from the My-Oh-My."

The Golden Lantern resembled the movie version of "The Teahouse of the August Moon." Everything in it was Japanese. Rice paper screens, scrolls of wood bark, bowls, urns of miniature pines displayed dolls of the Hina-matsuri (doll festival) huge rice paper lanterns, furniture of lacquer finish, some worked with mother of pearl, many embossed in gold leaf, fine drama masks, carved of the finest paulownia wood, fans on the paper walls of silk and ivory, porcelain pottery, bamboo partitions, some of kurodake, black, others in the natural wood finish, and burning incense, which invaded the senses.

The vast inner halls were thronged, dark silhouetted heads against the flaming red lighting, and the ceiling was clogged with blue smoke from cigarettes and cigars. Most of the patrons were Orientals, Tara noticed, as wraiths of the old Japan came back to haunt him, making him a little homseick for the surburbs of Minatoku, but there were a number of occidentals as well.

Food and drink was in abundance, like on the grand Japanese festival day of Omisoka, and there was a wild excited chatter around the food tables.

Everyone cheered upon his entrance, as a spotlight followed him and Niles to a small table reserved especially for him. It sat in the center of the long hall, directly fronting a small stage on

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which boys, nude except for silver-sequined crotch slings, performed acrobatics. Then, as the lights dimmed, Japanelle, in female attire, also scant, went into her (his) dance. It was the dance of the Azuma Odori, full of wiles and fury, calling on every part of the body. It ended in a clash of cymbals, drums, haunting strings, as Japanelle, whirling back his long crimson robe of sequined butterflies, revealed his nearly naked form, a form definitely that of a female, with rubber suction-cup breasts, the male image camouflaged by a strip of sparkling seed pearls which caught and refracted the crimson spotlight.

Tara, watching him with lustful, intent eyes, as he had watched other male performers in the circus, fascinated by their semi-nude forms trapped in the lights, he wanted Japanelle, not for always, like he wanted Jun, but for a night, maybe two, in a warm basking of strange interlude with this sparkling, provocative creature.

So through the course of the evening, being congratulated constantly on his daring performance in the ring, writing autographs, having his picture taken, hugged, kissed, he reigned supreme. He ate and drank to his content, laughed, joked, was the very heart, the main artery of the night and, when the party was over, Japanelle caught him by the hand and escorted him back stage to his apartments. Once inside, he drew back the white rice paper screens, as Tara swept him into his arms.

He was already tipsy on sake and fermented rice cakes, drugged, thwarted by his and Jun's quarrel, so for the moment, the night, he had no

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misgivings.

They lay on the bed in a welter of fiery emotion, their naked bodies bathed in the pale moon blue lantern hanging beside it, and Tara, immune to the outside world, back again on the Ginza, in the whirling multi-colored denzins of Tokyo, screwed Japanelle as Terry Blanche had screwed him, as Niles had screwed him, but this time Japanelle lay on his back, in the fashion of the female, as Tara, his desire inflamed, prodded him with his throbbing organ.

Dawn found them still in each others' arms, as the winds outside, fierce, belligerent, lifted the palms recklessly, with ill-timed abandon, and an announcement came in over Japanelle's tiny radio that small boat warnings were out, that hurrican Hilda, far out in the Gulf, was moving inland.

All that day, eating and drinking, fondling Japanelle, his cares, his love for Jun, his devotion, his loyalty tossed to the winds outside, Tara basked in his new role as a star, taking full enjoyment of his just-won rank, this wayward popularity which he had inherited so gladly, so happily.

That evening, as Japanelle dressed to meet his incoming patrons, stragglers, tourists mostly flushed in from the storm, brilliant in bright red sequined capris, red high-heeled boots, a cloak, looking very much like the Dragon Lady in the comics, one of the waiters tapped lightly on the rice paper screen. There was a visitor to see Tara.

Leaping out of bed, slipping into his crotch

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sling, throwing his iridescent cape around his bare shoulders, he followed the waiter down a long dark narrow hallway to the side entrance, with Japanelle on his heels, both automatically drawn to silence, their passions spent now, every emotion fled except the curiosity as to the caller and the wind outside which drove on the building, rattled the paper screens, tore at the glass paneling.

The waiter pushed back the screen leading into the foyer and a man stood near the entrance. He was dark, darker still in the dim lantern light, his hair a curly mass of black entanglement, his eyes black, piercing. He was clad in Marine dress uniform, his blue cape draped over one arm, his white barracks cap twirling casually in one gloved hand.

At the sight of him Tara drew in his breath

sharply.

"Are you Tara Akira?" the man asked shyly, his eyes fairly twinkling, then dulled as Tara nodded. "I am Erik Shanon, your father."

"Yes, I know," Tara said, breathless, now that the glad moment had arrived, the one which he had planned, had dreamed of for many years. "Welcome—wonderful to see you, Erik—father!"

"Tara Rasha has kept me informed," the man continued, as they both stood rooted to the spot, unable to stir, to shake hands, to embrace, as long-lost kin should. "You are quite a grown young man. I guess I expected someone smaller. You were but a babe when I left Tokyo, a seven week old babe in Rasha's arms."

"Long time ago," Tara managed to utter, as his keen eyes picked out every detail about his

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father, hopeful of seeing about him some resemblance to hiself. There was little likeness, for he had inherited the classic Japanese face, and Erik was purely occidental.

"Bad storm, isn't it," Erik said, as if there was nothing more to say. "Hurricane Hilda must be

quite a lady!"

"Yes-yes!" Tara murmured, speechless. He noticed that his father kept eyeing the surroundings, the waiter with the coiffeured hair, Japanelle in his shimmering red regalia, and he introduced them to him. They nodded warmly, politely, but said nothing.

"You stay long time," Tara said, at last finding his voice. "You see me in circus act, be proud of me. We get to know one another. Like

you knew my uncle Tara Rasha, no?"

Erik Shanon gave him a cold stare, his dark eyes refracting the dim lantern light, and his lower jaw fixed firmly.

"I think not," he said finally, after an interval

of silence.

Tara moved a little nearer to him, unconscious of his near nakedness, his one garment the dazzling crotch sling he wore during his aerial act, heedless of the female impersonator who stood at his shoulder, the strange garb, the delicate Oriental waiter, the flamboyant furnishings, the fleeting mimicry of what he was, what this place was.

"But, father!" he cried, his hands spread wide. "You only got here. We see each other much,

yes?"

"No," Erik said, still fumbling with his white cap, his jaw protruding now more than ever. "I came here, came here proudly, happily, to find

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my son. Instead, I have found a daughter."

Tara's mouth popped open, making a round O. He quivered, as every nerve in his body screamed through his system, exploding in his brain.

"You are just like Rasha!" Erik continued, bluntly, in a final tone of voice. "You're a fuck-

ing queer! And I'll have none of you!"

"You wrong, father!" Tara cried, his face furrowed in a hundred tiny wrinkles, his breath coming in loud, heavy gasps. "Me no Henna! Honest."

"You and that there . . ." Erik shouted directly, nodding toward Japanelle. "You think I'm deaf, dumb, and blind! I see through it all. I've been around. Your own uncle made a play for me before I left Tokyo. A trip through this blasted storm for nothing!" He turned to go.

"Wait! Wait!" Tara cried, going to him and taking hold of his arm. "Please do not go! The

hurricane is getting worse. Please!"

"Don't ever touch me again!" Erik said in anger, his eyes snapping fire, as he flung Tara's hand back.

"It's not all that bad," spoke up Japanelle, who moved in on them. "Mr. Shanon, we all have our separate worlds, our little private corners. Tara loves you, no matter what he is, and you're his father. You owe him that much."

Erik shot him an insolent gaze.

"I don't need any advice from the likes of you! I've seen enough, here, over at that queer circus. I'm going!"

He took hold of the latch, caught hold of his

collar, as if dreading to face the wind.

Suddenly, something vital, electric snapped in

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Tara's mind at the mention of the word circus.

Jun! Why of course ... Jun!

"Did Jun Suzuki tell you about me, about all this?" he asked in a frenzied voice, his lower lip trembling.

"What he said doesn't matter," Erik answered, giving him a disgusted look. "What I've

seen here has convinced me-plenty!"

"But you can't go in storm!" Tara whimpered, wanting to catch hold of him again and hold him back with force.

Erik let out a faint grin.

"I can't eh? I've been through a hell of a lot worse things than a storm." He gave Tara one last look. "Forget you had a father, ever, Tara. Good bye...as Hanna would say...sayonara."

He rushed out, bringing in a terrific draft,

slammed the door.

"Sayonara," Tara murmured after him, but it wasn't heard. He turned back to Japanelle silently, his dark head bowed, the tears welling up in his eyes. "I want to be alone," he said, when Japanelle lay a hand on his arm.

"I understand, baby," Japanelle said, leaving him to himself. He clapped his hands in indica-

tion that the waiter follow.

Alone now, Tara tried vainly to order his senses. He began to sob, his shoulders shaking, as all the old poison flowed through his body and into his tears; the poison of shame and remorse and what he actually was . . . what he was in the eyes of other men.

"Erik knows!" he sobbed aloud, as if this was the one important secret he wanted, always, to keep from him. And he considered how terrible

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he must have appeared in front of him, their first meeting, and him dressed like he was, with the glittering Japanelle haloed in the background.

"Trash! Trash! Trash! Trash!" he cried aloud, bending double, sinking to his knees, his haughtiness cowed at last, broken, defeated. "Warui! Warui! Bad ... bad. I'm no good! I'm low class henna. I'm queer! Queer! Queer!"

Out of his subconscious, like bats circling, darting at him, clawing, biting, whirled glimpses of his childhood, his strict schooling, his athletic achievements, lessons in karate, judo, swimming, his wondrous life amid the Samurai, everything which had added to his masculinity, rather than take from it. He thought too of Tara Rasha, living in a mixed world with him, sometimes male, sometimes female, confused, bewildered. Then, as if forbidden, spiced with shame, terrible shame, came visions of his brief life in America, the deplorable fat man rubbing his filthy body against him, Terry Blanche, Jun, Niles, and the debauchery which had so abundantly followed, the underworld existence he had catered to, had bowed to since the taste of male glory, its hidden raptures, its wild ecstasies, its ferocity, too, its touches of violence saw how, with unthinking abandon, he had followed that haunting call, partaking of its fruits with a greedy hunger with which he would have partaken of food, saw now how many had been affected by its secretive disease and who, in turn, had affected him: Harry the clown who loved to fondle his rectum, who never took off his make-up for fear of being exposed, always dressing in gaudy, comic female attire for his performance in the ring which, in

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reality was no more than being a queen in drag Spider the four-legged man who doted on Tara's beauty, who liked to look at him naked, as a reminder of his own ugliness, his grotesqueness of little Tinker with tears flowing down his cheeks, and the giant Babylon, who, if he so willed it; could have crushed him with one blow with his fists; of Little Pink Shoes the sign painter, who always carried around with him a jar of vaseline "just in case." He remembered Talmond who helped feed and water the stallions, who always wore an artificial padding in his crotch to emphasize his maleness, as the stallions' were emphasized, epitomizing the man's burning envy of the beasts' potential, of the negro cook who loved to give tongue baths, and Twiggy the tall man who was an exhibitionist. Too, unbidden, flowing through his tortured mind, were other members of the show who had their stange oddities: Thelma, the fat girl who loved small, young girls, Polas the bear trainer who gloated over men's hairy bodies, Dan the cowboy who liked it up his rear, Mickey the boy in the monkey act who went ape over kids, Sandy the man with the alligator hide in the freak show whose fetish was smooth, beautiful skin, and Darnell the darling bare back rider, the most beautiful girl in the circus, who craved shiny black men, and went out into the streets late at night and picked them up.

All these mutilated, tortured psyches swam in his brain, pinched at his nerves, laying bare his own life, his own personal desires. He was like them, a freak of nature, craving the male body so much he had cast aside his logic, his own sense of

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manhood—what manhood actually represented to mankind, the image of the true male. And out of all his torments he realized this: that in being male and desiring the male there was a power, a certain ferocity, a magnetic current, a maddening hold that, once interlocked into mind and logic, became rampant. Too, intermingled into this strange force was violence, sadism, lusts so strong, so addictive that nothing mattered, that nothing existed of value except lying between hard, muscular thighs, syphoning out the best in man, the life giving elixir of his strength.

Slowly rising from the bamboo mats, he stood up, tried to gather his senses about him, but again and again, like a black dragon riding pellmell over him, he thought of his father, the terrible look in his eyes, the deprecative cast of

his features, that haunted face.

Hurt, gutted with shame, burning to get back at the world, he knotted up his fist, jammed it through the rice paper screen, and listened with pleasure, with destructive awe, as it ripped from frame to frame.

"Trash! Trash!" he cried, as he saw himself in a new light, one of despicable status.

"Queer! Henna! Queer!"

Suddenly, he wanted Jun. Jun, sturdy, loyal, trustworthy! He wanted him now more than he had ever wanted him, wanted to lay his head in his lap, wanted to cry out his rage and heart-break. Many times, when he was tired and blue, weary of rehearsing, he had gone to him, had become soothed, calmed by Jun's warm hand on his hair, his soft lips speaking of timely things, old wonderful things; Japan, the world they had

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both known in Tokyo, their love, their hopes in the Circus of the Flowers, their young, ambitious dreams.

"Jun, forgive me!" he cried forlornly, the cry almost a religious lament, as he thought of all the people he had gone with, wallowed in sex with while Jun had remained the majestic statue of faith, trust, loyalty, kindness. Nowhere else in the world would he ever find anyone else like Jun. And he had been so unfaithful to him, so reckless, so wilful in his daring, his boldness. Erik Shanon had done him one favor if he had done nothing else by coming to him through the windy darkness like a savior. He had opened his eyes to himself, and how much he truly needed Jun.

Wheeling, not bothering to take the time to call a cab, he hurried out of the Golden Lantern, facing the storm. The wind sighed in the tall palms, and they bent attentive plumes to Tara. Along the border paths, in and out among the flagstone walks which made the Golden Lantern into a formal garden, the azaleas, wind-tossed like handfuls of confetti, would soon be paling towards their euthanasia, knowing the art of dying as well as living.

The storm was not abating, but instead was rising in a series of circling gusts, each one a blizzard. Willows, comely in the evening along the lamp lit eaves, were being stripped in a moment like prisoners by a savage conqueror for sacrifice. The air was full of leaves, old newspapers, limbs from the trees, long tangles of electric cables, each popping like rapid gunfire and Tara ran between them, his beautiful cape

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pulled about his dark nakedness, running to Jun, fleeing through the wail of the vanquished.

Once in the streets he slowed his pace, for debris lay everywhere, metal signs, trees uprooted, wires, poles, neon lights broken, blinking, words, letters black, missing and spelling out crazy, indistinguishable names. Near a filling station, as he ran past the S in the Shell sign had been shattered, and in rosy warning, the neon blinked repeatedly . . . HELL!

When he reached the big tent havoc was there also. In the tops of the canvas there was a continuous roaring, like an incoming tide on rocks. Creakings and groanings, sudden crashes, loud reports like cannon firing, were all about him as he hurried through the lane of sawdust and into the tent . . . a tiny figure in chaos.

Though he feared the storm, the popping of tent poles, the rocking lights, making fantastic patterns along the inner walls of the tent, he hurried with ease, with a note of calm in his bursting heart. For he knew Jun would be there, as always, waiting for him with out-stretched arms, loving, caring, as no one else.

Jun Suzuki ... his lover, the real essence of

his flaming, lustful world.

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## Chapter Ten

Inside the big tent preparations were already in progress for the night's performance, and many people, regardless of the approaching hurricane were filing past the ticket windows and into the long rows of benches. The band was playing, "If I Ever Cease to Love," and clowns were running here and there entertaining the children, rings were being set up for the first act, and the ringmaster dressed in a glittering riding habit, was already on his platform to present the acts over the sound system.

Though Tara's performance would be the last act, the climax to the show, he made his way swiftly through the well-lighted area, past the canvas partitions and toward the orange tent. Haunted, hungry to feel Jun's strong, hard arms around him, pulling him into his pure warmth, his masculine love, he kept his steady gait, the cape standing out vertically behind him, his dark shapely legs taking long easy strides, like the continuous lope of a wild animal that senses direction with an instinctive genius that baffles man's magnetic compass.

It was dark around the immediate area of the tent, but a golden light showed plainly through the crack in the entrance, and he rushed in between the taut ropes, his heart in his throat, but then he stopped abruptly, catching at his heart as if a pair with a sife a

heart, as if a pain pierced his side.

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Groans, like an animal, came from within the tent, and a sudden horror reared up in his own heart, making him tremble with the fear that something was wrong with Jun. Was he in pain? Was he dying?

His hair bristled, his nerves tightened, his body turned to lead, as he eased to the tent flap,

peered in through the tiny slit.

He shrank back in a cold sweat at what his

eyes beheld.

Jun was lying on the silken sindai completely naked, on his back, his thighs thrust up into the air, and Babylon was standing over him, naked also. Jun had Babylon's colossal prick in both his hands and it was being thrust up into his rectum.

"I'm getting—getting enough for the first time—in my life," Tara heard Jun moan, sigh, crying with ultimate bliss. Tara went white with

rage, then with remorseful hurt.

He couldn't believe his eyes! Not Jun! Not Jun with the mighty Babylon! Jim loved him! Jun was loyal, faithful to the letter! No! No!

In a welter of torment, sobbing quietly, he sank down to the sawdust, listened as if in a nightmare, to Jun's contented sighs, Babylon's satisfied moans, as, realizing what that sound implied, each sound tore through his jealous heart.

He lay, crouched against the tent flap, not believing, no longer caring as the awesome truth slowly soaked in. Jun had betrayed him! He had killed his faith in him, and with faith, his love!

Embalmed on hurt, grief, his father lost and finding Jun having sex with another man, Tara crouched, licking his wounds, nursing his heart-break, his ears faintly picking up the

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sounds within, sounds like awful intonations pouring in from doom: the steady squeaking of the silken sindai, Jun's lisping voice, saying things to Babylon he would never understand, and the powerful, guttural moans coming from the bowels of the giant.

Finally, all was still. Babylon tossed back the entrance flap, moved cat-like through the shadows, back toward his quarters. He failed to notice Tara crouched in the semi-darkness.

Slowly, Tara pulled himself to his feet, holding onto the canvas for support. He went in. Near one of the quarter poles stood his keen black whip, the one he used in handling Sarasota. He picked it up. Jun was still lying on the sindai, his legs spread, his face twisted with both satisfaction and pain. He lifted his head in surprise as Tara entered, came to the foot of the sindai and stood looking down at him.

"Why did you go with Babylon?" he asked, calmly at first, surprised by his own control of emotions.

"Because I wanted to," Jun said with sarcasm. The sound of his voice rang in the tent gloom, and it beat against Tara's heart like the sounds of a hammer against an anvil. Then, his rage broke.

He brought the whip down with all his might. It struck Jun's thigh, ripping flesh, leaving a thin red stain. Jun tried to rise, holding his arms above his head, as Tara brought the whip down raining blows and flinging shreds of skin as jealousy and thwarted rage lent him super-human strength. He brought the whip across Jun's body again and again, mercilessly, flinging drops

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of blood throughout the tent. Jun cried out, screamed, but Tara, bereft now of all balance, all logic, except his rebellious thirst for revenge, manipulated the whip like a machine, cracking it through the air, flogging Jun's naked body until he fell on the sindai in a welter of pain, sobbing brokenly.

"I still love you, Tara," he sobbed, his head buried in his arms protectively, as the cutting cracks of the whip rained on him with intense regularity. "Tara, no matter what you do ... I

love you. I love you."

I still love you!

The sound of those words, though smothered in tone, though drowned in tears, found their way to Tara's heart. He dropped the whip, looked down at Jun, saw with a wrench of pain the gashes, the long streaks or red, the flowing blood.

He wanted to forgive him, under the yoke of his own giult. Jun had gone to bed with only one man, while he had gone with many. He sank down beside him, his eyes blinded with tears.

"I only did it cause you went with that—that Japanelle!" Jun sobbed, his voice broken, torn with pain and remorse. "If you hadn't gone I wouldn't have looked at Babylon. You should know that."

"I know that now," siad Tara, putting his arm around him. "I've been a little fool! I'm sorry I

lost head, showed ass!"

"We must keep our love," Jun said, lifting his dark head and wiping away his tears with the back of his hand. "That is all we have in this country, our love for one another. Before you

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came, Tara, I was a very lonely man. But you brought Japan with you, happiness, and I became happy once more. I—I love Japan, Tara, and I miss it so. You are the only good thing that has happened to me in United States, you and Circus of the Flowers. What can I do to keep you? What can I say that will make you want to stay?"

"Nothing . . . nothing anymore," Tara said with truth. He kissed Jun affectionately on the brow. "All I ask now is you give me chance to love you."

Jun looked up at him, as tears anew flooded his eyes.

"Oh, Tara, I'm so happy now! Truly happy! I shake all over."

From the big tent the sounds of the band seeped into theirs. Talmon was sending his mighty stallions through their paces, and to the flamboyant melody of "Ben Hur." Tara had long since learned to associate acts by the sound of music, for each act kept its theme throughout the season. Next would be the bear act, then Jun's, then his. He trembled at the thought. Outside, the hurricane was raging, billowing the canvas like enormous waves of a sea.

"We've got to hide these whip marks," he said then to Jun, as he snapped back to sanity and reality. He grabbed up a wet cloth, dabbed at the blood, tried to clean away the red stains which criss-crossed Jun's naked thighs, his shoulders, his forearms.

"I'll never make it!" Jun sobbed anew. "I'm too nervous now, too mixed up—you, this beating, Babylon, the storm!"

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"You've got to make it!" Tara shouted, thinking of the circus, their acts, their fame. He pulled Jun to his feet. "Here, we'll use flesh colored make-up. I'll help you dress, like old times, eh?"

They both tried to smile at that, but failed

miserably.

Tara got his costume, helped him into his crotch sling, snapped the clasps, then rubbed him with flesh toned cream.

"Something terrible is going to happen!" Jun moaned, each time Tara rubbed the paint into his lacerations too hard. "This terrible wind, makes me scared! I hurt! Babylon! You—you—Tara, tell me you love me! Please! I've got to know, before I go up tonight . . . please."

"I love you," Tara said, kissing him warmly. He spread the cape, as Jun placed it around his shoulders. "Once on highwire you feel old self

again . . . mighty Jun Suzuki!"

The band was striking up the "Enter the Gladiators," now, Jun's theme. At the sound, he turned to Tara with a trembling sigh.

"Tara! Tara! I'm afraid! Afraid!"

Tara pushed him toward the entrance, watched with a deep and flowing admiration as Jun rushed toward the big top, noticed him square his shoulders, and the gesture went to his heart.

Tara then arranged his own costume properly, rubbed away the stains of blood on his arms left when he had embraced Jun, combed his long black hair, stuck the little silver star directly above his eyes, painted his eyebrows and lashes. Then he went to the animal tent, unlocked Sarasota's cage, hooked the silver leash to his pearl-

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studded collar, and hurried back to the canvas wings to await the end of Jun's performance.

But as he reached the enormous spreading flaps opening out onto the circus arena, the spectators, and the three huge rings within the area of the quarter poles, he shrank back with terror, as a wild onrush of screams tore through the vast audience. He looked up, saw the canvas ceiling rolling, tumbling from the onslaught of the hurricane, saw the poles wobbling back and forth like the trunks of saplings in a wind driven forest, saw cables snapping, saw the body of Jun, resplendent in his nakedness, clutch for a rope that wasn't there. A moment later, he was plunging through the air, down, down, like a drop of lead. He struck the floor of the arena, bounced slightly, then lay still, as a hushed sound of low horror swept through the audience.

At the sight of Jun there, so still, so lifeless, Tara all but fainted. He grabbed the flap for support, as Sarasota let out anguished growls, cowering in fright under the racket of the storm. Tara started to run to the cat, to lift him in his arms, but the sounds of "Quo Vadis," began to roar in triumphant glory. It was his cue. Nothing Tara started to run to Jun, to lift him in his body wouldn't budge. He stood, as if petrified, his eyes glued to Jun's body being picked up by two internes, their white uniforms harsh under the lights, place him on a stretcher. They ran past him as the rising screams of the spectators followed like a haunting wail, in the direction of the hospital tent. He caught one fleeting glimpse of Jun's face. It was covered with sawdust, as was the rest of his body, sawdust and make-up,

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paint and blood.

The ringmaster, with a microphone to his lips, began to announce Tara's act, the sounds blatting like thunder throughout the big tent.

"Next, ladies and gentlemen, Tara Akira, from the land of the geisha, in one of the most death-defying acts of the century. Man and feline, sword and torch, fireflies of the heavens, testing every nerve, every sinew, defying gravity, defying mortality."

Clicking to Sarasota, Tara rushed out to center ring-the purple ring. Two attendants, blonde Swedes, followed, took his cape as he made a graceful bow. Without delay, nerveless, trying not to think of Jun, so still, so near to death, he thrust the knife handle into his mouth, closed down on it with his perfect teeth. He then balanced the sword to the tip end of this, on which were in turn balanced a tray, goblets, a flagon of wine, a torch, which one of the Swedes put to flame. He began to move toward the vertical ladder, inch by inch. Already Sarasota had taken his place at the base of the winding spiral. Once at the ladder, Tara gave the signal one snap of his fingers, and the panther began to walk slowly around the spiral, as Tara mounted the ladder and moved rung by rung up, up into the heaving, billowing ceiling, closing his eyes so that he could not see the canvas rippling over the poles, the sky ropes swaying recklessly, the lights bobbing, the giant sunflower like a timid daisy in the wind.

At the top, he gripped the upright handles of the ladder, pivoted his body until he lay prone, the sword and knife but touching tip to tip. He

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trembled, as emotions ran wild through his veins.

It would soon be over! Buddha! It would soon be over, then he could go to Jun, be with Jun forever! If only—if only Jun were not dead. Buddha. Let him live! Let him live!

He felt the paws of Sarasota on his ankles now, felt the weight of his powerful black body moving up along his thighs, felt his front paws now on his chest, his back ones on the turn of his thighs, knew that he was standing tall, majestic, proud, though he could not see him.

Wide awake in every sense, more alert than he had ever been in his life, and yet so terrified he hardly dared to breathe, he opened his eyes and started toward the tent ceiling. The wide ocean of canvas was rolling over the poles like waves. There was a great cracking of wood, of timbers, ropes and cnavas, so loud he could but faintly hear the band, signaling him his cue to snap his finger, so that Sarasota would know to return to his perch and start down the spiral. The loudest sounds startled him, the smaller sounds more so, like death coming on padded feet. The downward movement of the canvas as it wobbled and rolled above chilled him but it was the stealthy movements of Sarasota, made nervous by the storm, which made him almost scream. His ears were sensitively recording all the stir around them, and his nose was taking every odor that came on the breeze which escaped outside and into the tent. He smelled blood!

Had he scratched himself when flogging Jun?

He went hysterical at the thought.
Then, as a gush of wind lifted the canvas,

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snapping cables, his torch went out! He and Sarasota momentarily were framed in semi-darkness. He could feel Sarasota moving closer to him, feel his hot breath on his neck, obviously seeking his bodily protection. And he knew that the panther was as frightened as he.

No sooner had the torch gone out then the lights, their electric cables snapping, flooded the tent with immediate blackness. In the sudden onrush of darkness Tara lost control of his balance, as the tray and goblets swayed, fell, came down around him. Then the sword, then the

knife, as he spat it out in fright.

Then, lifting his head, trying to console the frenzied panther, out of the intense darkness he saw the two terrible eyes looking at him, and he became so choked with terror that he could not scream. The hair rose on his head and over his body, a sensation like that of cold water flowing moved over every part of his flesh. The beating of his heart shook him to the very base of his limbs. And he could feel the soles of his feet burn as if by stinging needles. For a moment the eyes of Sarasota vanished, then they were looking at him again, sickly yellow slits in the darkness, the howling madness of the mobs below, the drowning wind, the music.

He realized Sarasota was approaching him, inch by inch, and as the yellow eyes stared at him, he became hypnotized and helpless. Then he gave a choked cry of despair, thinking of his life, Jun, an awful strangled moan, as he lifted

his head further up.

In that same instant Sarasota sprang. The frightened cat struck him with the full force of

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its weight, with claws and teeth sinking deep into his flesh.

Tara felt no pain, only crushing and smothering embrace, only the utter despair of one alone with darkness and with death. The claws which gutted him, he did not feel, and when opened jaws closed on his throat there was no pain then, only the vague sense of having his breath choked off. Then, there was an inrush of smothering horror, as the blackness of death poured into his mind.

\* \* \*

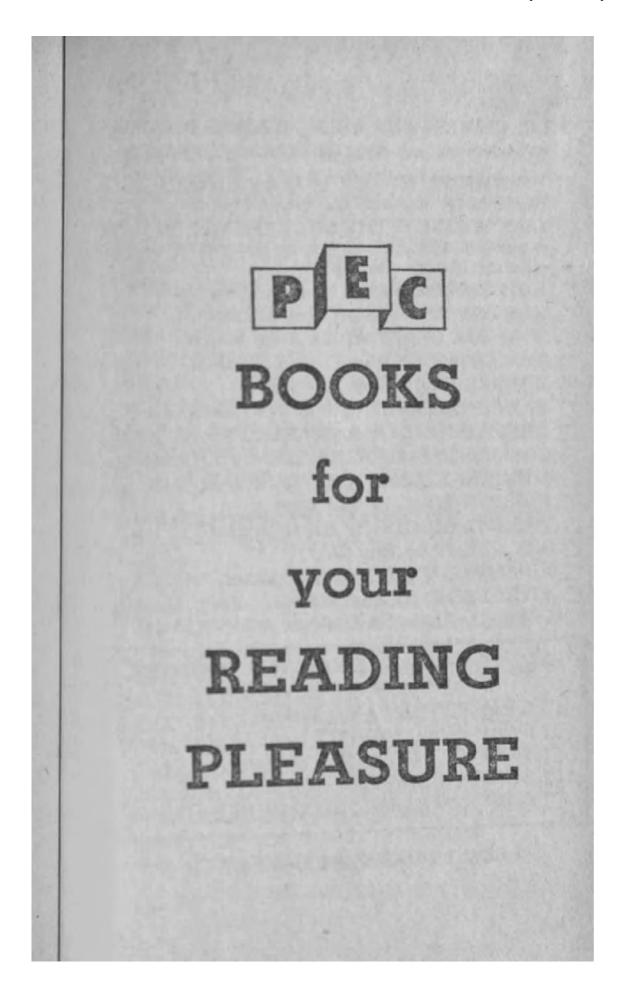
At the end of Canal Street in New Orleans there is a cemetery named Metairie. There is one tomb within it that stands out unique, not that it is larger and grander than the others, all constructed of white marble, above ground because of the water seepage, but unique in that, crowning its arched top is a tiny marble replica of the Japanese Itsukushima Shrine, and below it, no taller than an inch, is a jade statue of Buddha.

Only one person ever pays it homage. He is a young man, obviously Japanese, but he walks with a cane, and his arms are twisted, pale pertrified shapes, almost gnarled, and he moves so slowly he is more like a shadow.

Daily he comes, hobbles to the site, places a huge bouquet of red roses on the tomb, stands for a moment silently, in meditation, then departs.

The End.

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